TRANSMUTING THE MUNDANE INTO TRANSCENDENCE: MIGRATIONS OF MYTH AND ITS CONNECTION TO CONTEMPORARY COMICS

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the human capacity of modifying established myth in the light of new circumstances. It focuses on the changing status of myth and mythical cosmologies in Western culture as advances in telematics and techno-culture has led to the abundant proliferation of mythic content in modern society. The rise of scientific, secular and rational tendencies in the Occident has resulted in the demystification and negation of some myths and the cultural realities they once supported. Mythical symbols, however, do exhibit a certain degree of independence from their original set ontologies, growing and transforming continuously within contemporary culture as they are communicated to all social spheres. A particular focus is placed on the demystification of myth and its ability to be appropriated within other discourses, most notably fiction. As such, myth tends to exhibit certain migratory and conservational qualities that this study investigates. This serves as background for this thesis that is primarily located within the broader theoretical argument of myth as a system of world-representation in society, the main point of discussion is the re-appropriation of myth within the narrower field of visual signification, specifically the comics medium, as exemplified in the works of Neil Gaiman and Conrad Botes, as well as in my own work.

ABSTRAK

Die tesis ondersoek die menslike kapasiteit om gevestigde mites te wysig in die lig van nuwe omstandighede. Dit fokus op die veranderlike status van mites en mitiese kosmologieë in die Westerse kultuur, aangesien vooruitgang in die telematiek en tegno-kultuur gelei het tot ’n ryk proliferasie van mitiese inhoud in die moderne samelewing. Die opkoms van wetenskaplike, sekulêre en rasionele tendense in die Weste het die demistifikasie en negasie van sommige mites en kulturele realiteite wat hulle eens ondersteun het, tot gevolg gehad. Mitiese simbole vertoon egter ’n sekere graad van onafhanklikheid van hul oorspronklike vasgestelde ontologieë en groei wild binne die kontemporêre kultuur, aangesien hulle deurlopend gekommunikeer word aan verskillende sosiale sfere. Daar word veral gefokus op die demistifikasie van die mite en sy vermoë om geapproprieer te word binne ander diskoerse, veral in fiksie. As sodanig is mites geneig tot migrasie en die vertoon van konserverende kwaliteite, soos ondersoek in hierdie studie. Alhoewel die tesis eerstens gelokaliseer is binne die breër teoretiese argumentasie rondom mite as ’n sisteem van wêreldrepresentasie in die samelewing, is die kern van diskussie die re-appropriasie van die mite binne die smaller veld van visuele betekenisgewing, spesifiek in strippe as medium, soos uitgelig in die werke van Neil Gaiman en Conrad Botes, asook in my eie werk.

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. INTRODUCTION

In this study I wish to consider the nature and importance of myth and mythical forms of expression within a contemporary cultural context. I aim to investigate the migratory and transformational qualities myth exhibits as it is mass-communicated through telematics and techno-culture to a variety of cultural spheres within modern society. I wish to discuss myth's ability to posit a cultural reality and examine how that reality could be destabilised, resulting in the re-appropriation of myth by other discourses, bringing about a shift in domain, since it could be assumed that myth has migrated from its original conceptual territory to another, newer one. The purpose of this study is to investigate the changing form of myth and the changing status of its symbolisms as it is re-appropriated within other texts, specifically focussing on comics as a fictional form of narration.

With regard to the title of my thesis, the term 'migration' generally refers to the act of moving or passing from one place of abode to another. When applied to myth it relates to the transportation of mythic content to other conceptual realms outside of those contexts that originally engendered them. The main thought behind this formulation was inspired by the literary theorist, Thomas Pavel, who stated that:

> after a certain period of time, belief in particular gods might wane. There is no unique cause for this phenomenon: people are exposed to foreign religions and acquire a sense of religious relativity, philosophers offer new alternatives based on abstract reasoning, new religions subvert old ones. . . More likely, the mythology *as a*

> *whole* starts gradually to lose its credibility. When a mythological system gradually loses its grip on a society, the ancient gods and heroes start to be perceived as fictional characters (1986: 40-41).

This means that a mythology would then no longer specify a sacred ontology, but a fictional one. Though Pavel framed this idea chiefly in the context of religion (as one form of mythical expression), it can be equally applied to most myths (if not all) whether secular or religious, traditional or modern. As soon as disenchantment or disillusionment occurs regarding a myth, the cultural reality it postulates tends to become destabilised and loses to a certain degree its hold on society because its ideology no longer seems credible. This, however, does not entail the complete negation of myth, because its symbolisms constitute too great an emotional investment by society over the course of time to be simply forgotten or discarded. Instead it is retained and re-appropriated within other discourses, one of which is fiction. Since in many societies factual statements about the world are closely related to mythical ones, if myth is reduced to fiction then what was once deemed 'factual' now necessarily entails fallacy. This begs the question to what extent mythical symbols or content can still retain or allude to their original functions within the discourse of fiction. I explore this notion more fully in an analysis of the re-appropriation of mythic content in comics. Individual artists such as Neil Gaiman, Conrad Botes and myself use a wide variety of mythical representations within our own works, and the narratives we create can be defined as constituting separate fictional worlds characterised by a distinct use of mythological language.

Although this thesis deals with the application of myth in contemporary comics it is not so much concerned with the dynamics of comics[1] as medium. An apt definition of comics by Scott McCloud sees the comic book as an object whose set-up consists of "pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and / or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (1993: 9). This definition says nothing of the use of text, yet comics today is largely considered a hybrid art from, one that combines within its format two distinctly different languages, namely the visual as well as the written representing the verbal. To sum up, then: comics are chiefly defined by the following two characteristics: (1) a particular text/image relation, and (2) the use of successive frames to indicate time and motion. The overall nature of the comics product is aptly described by Douglas Wolk:

> comics suggest motion, but they're incapable of actually showing motion. They indicate sound, and even spell it out, but they are silent. They imply the passage of time, but their temporal experience is controlled by the reader more than the artist. They convey continuous stories, but they are made up of a series of discrete moments. They're concerned with conveying an artist's perceptions, but one of their most crucial components is the blank space (2007: 125).

[1] The beginnings of the comic book, or to use the more popular term 'comics', as it is currently known, are rooted in cartoons. A cartoon may be defined as a "schematic, simplified drawing usually involving exaggeration or distortion"(Spiegelman cited in Juno 1997: 9). An example of this would be the satirical cartoons seen in the newspapers commenting on the state of affairs in a given country. By contrast, a comic is viewed as "clusters of cartoons strung together to indicate time" in relation to an unfolding story or theme (Spiegelman cited in Juno 1997: 9) . In this kind of book, the narrative is predominantly visual and is not necessarily dependent on text.

This is the medium that my thesis focuses on, since the individual works of Neil Gaiman, Conrad Botes and myself discussed in this study are located within its context. Though comics do come with their own context and discourse, these will mostly be ignored since the topic of discussion is not so much how representation of myth is conveyed through comics, but rather what form and individual turn these artist's representation of myth took.

Myth and mythical representations are widespread in modern society and generally denote narratives of a specific quality or content that cannot be restricted to a single form or a simple set of principles. They embody dynamic structures of meaning that change according to each culture and era. Myth's variety in expression, diversity in application and multivalent nature make it difficult to provide a single, platonic definition thereof, and as such it constitutes a somewhat loose term with considerable weight behind it. For that reason my use of myth in this study tends to exhibit a certain elasticity. I am more concerned with the broader, rather than the particular, application of myth in life and culture. Since different theories about myth could be taken as different statements about it, this thesis is not located within a single theoretical framework, but uses several. If myth is taken as a symbolic representation of the world then from the perspective of social semiotics it constitutes a code within culture. Myth spans a wide variety of representational modes and forms a diversity of codes and sub-codes that permeates all social strata. Since a symbol represents a vehicle of communication, myth can be equated to a symbolic language, although the notion of language is applied more broadly than usual and is here taken to stipulate a codified system of representation. The theoretical foundation of this thesis is therefore predominantly influenced firstly by Roland Barthes's take on myth as

constituting a meta-language, representing a higher order of signification in society; secondly by Jean Francois Lyotard's formulation of myth as a meta or grand narrative constituting an ideological pattern of priority according to which knowledge about the world is structured and then imposed on society; and lastly by Joseph Campbell's more general application of myth as symbolic language. To Campbell, myth constituted a dynamic form of symbolic mediation that reconciles nature and culture, harmonizing the individual with society within its environment as a whole.

In researching the migratory and transformational qualities of myth and its re-appropriation by other discourses, which can be seen as an act of conservation regarding mythic material, Barthes's work was useful. In his *Mythologies* (1957) Barthes equated myth with a type of *speech,* but not just any type of speech, rather a very specific one. He saw myth as a system of communication that needed special conditions in order for its language to become mythic. “Since myth is a type of speech, everything can be myth provided it conveyed by a particular discourse” (1957: 109). Myth, therefore, denotes an open structure that can have any content, but what is deemed mythic is always located historically since changes in the material conditions of society are reflected in the changing status of its myths. For Barthes myths indicated a higher mode of signification, a meta-language constitutive of ideological narratives that reflected the dominant concepts supporting particular worldviews. Barthes was also informative in illustrating how older ideologies are still retained and active within contemporary culture: even if they are reduced to a secondary status or a trivialised version of their previous embodiment, they could still exercise the power to influence and shape society. This relates directly to my

discussion regarding the changing status of myth and certain mythological cosmologies, the transformation of its symbolisms and its transference into new discourses.

A myth propagates a worldview on which a culture could be based, and may well be defined as an overarching narrative specific to a culture, stipulating a totality that both discloses and limits knowledge about the world. Since this thesis looks at how a myth's hold on society might become destabilised, one of the reasons stated is that when a myth's ideology no longer seems credible, it results in the loss of integrity regarding its worldview. Myths generally constitute a narrative form of knowledge, and as such their hold on society can become destabilised if they are challenged by other forms of knowledge. Lyotard's inquiry into the status of knowledge in *The Postmodern Condition* (1984) proved to be enlightening. He equated myth with meta-narrative, which can in a sense be compared to some kind of 'proto-narrative' that defines the values other narratives express and which they use in turn to determine their own legitimacy. For Lyotard knowledge about the world in modern society was chiefly conveyed through the discourses of science and narrative. The rise of scientific thought[2] and the technological advancements it has brought about has placed the status of grand narratives, as a dominant form of knowledge about the world, in a state of crisis. Consequently, myths as stipulating totalities are placed under duress, since the condition of postmodernity in contemporary society markedly tends to disband or partially disband grand narratives. From this perspective, myths are destabilised when the knowledge about the world they

[2] 'The rise of scientific thought' is here used in the context of the Enlightenment and refers to an era in 18th European history where cultural and intellectual life was marked by a strong belief in rationality and science. The Enlightenment is generally perceived as the foundation on which the modern political and intellectual developments of Western culture rests and reflects a worldview that is validated increasingly by science rather than tradition or religion (Brians 1998: www.wsu.edu./~brians/hum_303/enlightenment. html).

propagate are placed alongside their scientific counterpart. When disillusionment or disenchantment regarding a myth occurs it becomes detached from its previously set ontologies and is appropriated by other conceptual domains. When myth is viewed as fiction, whether sacred or cultural, in a society geared towards mass consumption and entertainment, a certain magnitude of circulation occurs which results in the widespread migration of mythologies and change regarding cosmologies.

Finally, for the importance myth might have and the purposes it might serve in a contemporary society and the life of the individual, I rely chiefly on the writings of Joseph Campbell. In an interview with Bill Moyers in *The Power of Myth* (1989), Joseph Campbell states that myths predominantly fulfil four functions in society, by respectively providing certain sociological, metaphysical, cosmological and psychological 'truths' according to which an individual might organise his/her life. In this respect myth functions as an orientating principle that might give meaning to life through providing an individual with a set of values according to which he/she might choose to live his/her life. Campbell focused on the human condition as influenced by myth; to him myth was only important in the way in which it relates to us. As a generalist in the field of comparative mythology Campbell was often criticised for making grand generalisations about myth, or for dwelling too much on the psychological interpretation of myth and for confining the role of myth in contemporary culture to only serving either ideological or therapeutic functions (Moyers 1989: xx). In a study of Campbell's work Robert Segal states that:

> on the one hand, then, Campbell is the grandest defender of myth. On the other hand he is oddly not much interested in myth – as myth. He is much more interested in human nature, which he simply finds revealed in myths. . . He is far more concerned with the information myths contain than the myths themselves (cited in Rauch 2003: 140).

For Segal, Campbell spent too much time revelling in myth and not enough analysing it (Rauch 2003: 140). Although Campbell might not have been considered a serious academic by the likes of Segal and was criticised for focusing too much on the human condition in his discussions of myth, I would say that this is where his value lay. The human condition is exactly what produces mythology, and in the end is what gives these stories their particular value.

In chapter 2 I investigate the origin, definition and function of myth. Since Greek culture constitutes the West's most important frame of reference regarding the origin of myth, I look first at the various attitudes prominent Greek philosophers like Plato, Aristotle and Plutarch had towards the subject. This is then followed by a discussion of the more modern definitions of the term as established in the fields of anthropology, philosophy and psychology by the likes of Claude Levi-Strauss (Strauss cited in Charbonnier 1969), Franz Boas (1938), Bronislaw Malinowski (1963), Carl Gustav Jung (1959) and Sigmund Freud (Freud cited in Eliade 1969). Lastly, from the perspective of social semiotics, I explore what functions myth might fulfil in society as a symbolic language and how myth might be conveyed through art as a symbolic form of representation.

Chapter 3 establishes ways in which myth might postulate a cultural reality which constitutes a point of orientation in society, and how its influence could be destabilised or reduced as exemplified in the case of religion. It follows that the secular and rationalistic trends previously established by Greek thinkers have carried over into the twenty-first century. Advances in technology and science, mass media, instant communication, religious relativity and a rising culture of intellectualism have brought about a curbing and curtailment of religion as stipulating a dominant ideology within Western culture. This chapter investigates how theories postulated by modern philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche (1974) and Karl Marx (2005) could well have contributed to destabilising a mythological system's hold on society, as expressed in the example of religion. I explore myth's re-appropriation into the realm of fiction by following Pavel's notion that if a mythological system weakens or wanes it undergoes a change in status, since its gods and heroes are no longer perceived as definitive embodiments of core values in life and culture, but rather as fictional characters.

Chapter 4 discusses the use of myth and mythic symbols in fiction, as found specifically in comics. I look in particular at the works of Neil Gaiman and Conrad Botes as two prominent artists within this medium. The individual works of both Botes and Gaiman under discussion in this chapter could be defined as constituting unique fictional worlds with a distinct use of mythological language. This chapter, therefore, predominantly investigates how mythic symbols might function in fiction, what purpose they might serve and how mythic content might be reloaded back into society, albeit in an altered state, through the discourse of comics.

Chapter 5 is a discussion of my own work, which, like that of both Botes and Gaiman, also constitutes a unique fictional expression with a distinct use of mythological language. I look specifically at how, as an *Afrikaans*-speaking South African artist, my work is influenced by and expressive of the greater myth heritage of *Afrikanerdom*. I use myself as an example of how myth and mythic symbols might be internalised by an individual member of society, but also how it is consequently externalised again in a remodelled and altered state through artistic expression. This chapter explores some of the consequences that occur when mythic symbols are adapted to suit individual needs, which could result in a change or broadening of meaning regarding myth's semantics, as each new act of retelling brings with it its own connotations and associations.

Lastly, in chapter 6 I conclude with the view that though scientific and rationalistic forms of thought have come to challenge myth as a dominant form of knowledge about the world, mythic thought is not wholly negated and ever remains a mainstay of human life and culture. New myths are continuously formed as the material conditions of society change and older ideologies are not simply forgotten; instead their symbolisms are retained and might still exert an influence on human consciousness. In contemporary culture myth still constitutes an interpretive framework that individuals could employ for rendering and defining the world, but which subversively, in turn, could also render and define them. If so, then a more complex a mythology will necessarily denote a greater, more involved and intricate understanding regarding life and culture and the individual's place therein. Myth could be deemed vital to culture in its ability to support the life of the individual. As such, artists could play an important role in society in their capacity to broaden and expand the

semantics of myth and its symbolisms, bringing about a more complex form of signification that denotes a more fuller understanding of the world. Even within fiction myth can not wholly be negated, since it symbolisms could still retain and allude to much of their previous qualities. Fiction also constitutes its own 'truth' within its own frame of reference, and, therefore, can in turn be mythologised if, as Barthes would have it, anything can become mythical provided it is conveyed by a particular type of discourse.

2. MYTH

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Myth has always held a particular fascination as narratives designating that part of the human imagination concerned with world-creating powers. For the most part, taking the form of archaic, yet familiar narratives which are still active within modern society as a multiform occurrence, tying the present to its ancient past. Since there is both history in myth and myth in history it is strange “that we are suspicious of the first and respectful of the latter” (Wiesel 1980: 21-22). However, myth tends to be older than written history, tied to a seemingly antediluvian past. It reflects a time when mythical elements were handed down from tradition to tradition, resulting in the loss of a myth’s origin since primitive society was not concerned with documenting the original impetus behind a myth’s creation. It can only be guessed at as to what once constituted a myth’s true source. Joseph Campbell (1989: 89) states that the earliest examples of mythical thinking have to do with graves. “We do know that burials always involve the idea of the continued life beyond the plane of the visible one, of a plane of being that is behind the visible plane, and is somehow supportive of the visible one to which we have to relate” (1989: 90). For him, a myth amounts to a metaphor for what lies beyond the visible world, but concerning its origin he can only speculate.

Concerning the origin of myth it would then be best to turn to the West’s most important frame of reference regarding the subject. Whether it is *mythe* in French, *mythos* in German, *mif* in Russian or *myth* in English, all seem to be transcriptions of the Greek

muthos (Brisson 2004: 15). By itself, Greek society's attitude towards myth has shaped much of the intellectual development of Greek culture (Kirk 1970: 250). Before the use of writing, Greek society was predominantly influenced by the oral discourse of poetry; a longstanding and formalized mythological tradition, which held sole control of the transmission of the memorable. However, from the "seventh century B.C. onward, the adoption of a radically new system of writing that virtually put reading within everyone's grasp led to the emergence of two new types of discourse: that of 'history' and that of 'philosophy'" (Brisson 2004: 4). Consequently, the discourse of myth came under fire as prominent Greek thinkers and philosophers came to reflect on it. This chapter traces the changing attitudes of Greek society towards myth as expressed by the notable figures of Plato, Aristotle and Plutarch. It follows the secular and rationalistic approaches adopted by Greek thinkers to myth that have carried over into the twenty-first century and remain influential, today, in terms of how myth is viewed with regards to definition and function. The differing views of myth by Greek philosophers like Plato, Aristotle and Plutarch constitute a good starting point for illustrating its multifaceted nature. However, ideas regarding myth first formulated by the Greeks have been successively furthered by modern thinkers. Prominent figures like Carl Gustav Jung, Joseph Campbell, Franz Boas, Claude Levi-Strauss, Bronislaw Malinowski and Roland Barthes are responsible for some of the more prevalent views on myth in contemporary society, which will be mentioned later in this chapter. These theorists have broadened the application and discourse of myth in the various fields of anthropology, philosophy and psychology. That allows for a much greater insight in how myth might function in society and what it might mean to the individual, currently.

2.2 THE ORIGIN OF MYTHS

The word “myth” is derived from the ancient Greek *muthos* (Brisson 2004: 15). The original context of *muthos* does not carry the same implications as *myth* does today. To the archaic Greeks the notion of *muthos* embodied a wide semantic span. In a basic sense it merely meant speech, and was used liberally to refer either to the plot of a play, a tale, a statement uttered or the act of telling (Kirk 1970: 8). Hence, in a culture defined by a tradition where all relevant information was exclusively transmitted through word of mouth, *muthos* came to denote a particular type of speech that carried “implications of power and efficacy” related “to the special powers of the creative poetic word”[3] (Morgan 2000: 18). However, the slow and continuous modification of language effected changes in the vocabulary of ‘speech’, and the notion of *muthos* remained open due to the flexibility of meaning inherent in an oral culture. It was only in the time of Plato[4](428 – 328 B.C.) that the concept of *muthos* became formalized and definitive.

For Plato *muthos* came to signify discourse that could not be verified, in contrast to *logos*, a term used to designate verifiable discourse (Brisson 2004: 20). Consequently, *muthos* was strongly associated with the speech of the poets; the traditional tales they told projected a mythological world that characterized the larger cultural context in which early Greek philosophy found itself. Over time *logos* came to relate the discourse of an emerging philosophical polemic, that defined itself through opposition to the dominant

[3] The most popular examples of the ‘creative poetic word’ are Homer’s *The Iliad* and Hesiod’s *Theogeny.* Recorded as far back as 775-725 B.C., these works are the earliest surviving records of Greek mythology (Rosenberg 1986: 2).

[4] Plato is considered to be the father of modern philosophy in the West (Jowett 1970: 11).

discourse of poetry. This resulted in the archaic notion of *muthos* slowly converging into the standard definition of myth[5] today. From an argumentative perspective myth was considered as unverifiable discourse because "it's referent is located either at a level of reality inaccessible both to the intellect and the senses, or at the level of sensible things, but in a past of which the speaker of the discourse can have no direct or indirect experience" (Brisson 2004: 23). Most ancient Greeks considered myth to portray an undemonstratable truth, one that was deemed axiomatic because poets claimed inspiration from the Muses. A Muse-based authority (Morgan 2000: 36) was problematical for philosophers like Plato, because an 'undemonstratable truth' is exactly that, as a world view gained through the gods it could not be questioned. The version of the world purported by the poets through myth could not be argued by the speaker, nor verified, but remained resistant to criticism due to its divine inspiration. Therefore, in the time of Plato, myth was often equated with the notion of falsehood. Plato repeatedly elaborates on what he deems as the fallacy of the poets in *The Republic*:

[5] Generally myths are viewed as stories that in the light of tradition are said to have once occurred in the past and that usually constitute narratives that portray the origin and creation of the world and all phenomena therein, whether cultural, natural or supernatural, through the exploits of the gods, or some other supernatural, or legendary entities.

> Of what tales are you speaking? He said.
>
> . . .Those, I said, which are narrated by Homer and Hesiod, and the rest of the poets, who have ever been the great story-tellers of mankind. But which stories do you mean, he said; and what fault do you find with them? A fault which is fundamental and most serious, I said; the fault of saying what is false, and doing so for no good purpose. But when is this fault committed?
>
> Whenever an erroneous representation is made of the nature of the gods and heroes, - as when a painter paints a picture not having the shadow of a likeness to his subject[6] (*The Republic* 377c-377e).

He continues in a similar vein:

> Also in the tales of mythology, of which we were just now speaking – because we do not know the truth about ancient times, we make falsehood as much like truth as we can, and so turn it to account (*The Republic* 382d).

These early debates surrounding the nature of myth resulted in the separation of myth and poetry from its truth-claiming foundations. Plato objected to the literal reception of myth by the Greek public, especially in a culture where stories concerning its relevant history and belief system were constantly reinvented or modified by the poets. He viewed myth as a

[6] It should be noted that Plato's condemnation of myth as falsehood does not relate the condemnation of myth, per se. Rather his disapproval stems from the way that myth was employed by the poets and how, subsequently, it was received by the public. He was critical of the specific way that myth was used and not with myth in itself.

discourse in which no certainty about the true nature of the world could be attained, because the language employed by it was not an adequate expression of reality. Consequently, a negative connotation was attached to myth, but the notion concerning the untruthfulness[7] of its discourse remained open as a subject for stimulating debate. In the end, myth proved resilient to Plato's brutal condemnation as it was preserved in the dramatic vision of the tragedians and those Greek thinkers who approached it from an allegorical perspective (Brisson 2004: 29). On a lesser note, tragedy redeemed myth through reinterpretation; old versions of antiquated tales were innovated and adapted to suite contemporary ideals and problems. The most crucial factor, however, was the application of allegory to myth. It was decisive in ensuring a non-literal take on out-of-date archaic notions that contemporary, classical Greeks held to be absurd or strange in an ethical or rational context. Instead, the Greeks held that allegory uncovered a deep level of meaning hidden beneath the literal representations of myth. This made for a dynamic and unbroken interpretation of myth that corresponded to the fluctuating principles, concerns and advances of the day. The use of allegory by Greek thinkers made a change of attitude towards the interpretation of myth evident, one which was noticeably criticized by Plato. Although his definition of myth as 'unverifiable discourse' still held sway, his own student, Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), practised a benign approach to myth and on occasion participated in the use of allegory (Appignanesi 2003: 27). Aristotle established a close relation between the separate discourses of philosophy and myth. For him, an interest in myth was evidence of an inherent desire to gain wisdom (Brisson 2004: 29). He saw myth and philosophy as sharing an affinity, because both are concerned with spheres of

[7] The idea of the untruthfulness of myth still holds weight today, most dictionary definitions equate the term with fictitious stories about the gods or other supernatural beings set in a fabricated past.

knowledge; it could even be said that the one led to the other. In a sense, mythology functioned as inspiration for philosophy.

> For it is owing to their wonder that men now begin and at first began to philosophize; they wondered originally at the obvious difficulties, then advanced little by little and stated the difficulties about the greater matters, e.g. about the phenomena of the moon and those of the sun and the stars, and about the genesis of the universe. And a man who is puzzled and wonders thinks himself ignorant. Whence even the lover of myth is in a sense a lover of wisdom, for myth is composed of wonders (*Metaphysics* 982bII-19 cited in Brisson 2004:29).

After Aristotle Greek society saw the fragmentation of philosophy into a variety of schools, most notably the Stoics, the Epicureans and the New Academy. It was in the doctrine adopted by the Stoics that the allegorical interpretation of myth would reach its highest point. The Stoics' doctrine held two main traits: “the acceptance of the existence of all the traditional divinities, and the allegorical justification of their nature; they are benefactor deities, immaterial values, and beneficent and natural realities” (Brisson 2004: 54-55). These conclusions reached were always aided and justified by the use of etymology and were ridiculed by both Epicureans and the philosophers of the New Academy. However, despite these criticisms the allegorical interpretation of myth remained dominant, till a new exegesis was applied to it in the first century B.C. (Brisson 2004: 55).

It came to be that myth was held to emanate a divine truth, one that originated directly from the gods. It was believed that this truth was indirectly expressed in the works of poets like Homer and Hesiod, and philosophers like Plato and Pythagoras. Philosophers who assumed that Plato drew inspiration from Pythagoras began to equate myth with the concepts of 'symbol' and 'enigma' (Brisson 2004: 56-61). The notion of 'enigma' related deeply to that of the 'Mysteries', which were the foundations of Greek spirituality and characterized by secrecy (Eliade 1969: 60). Participation in the 'Mysteries' could only occur through initiation and was therefore, exclusive. So too was participation in the truth purported by this new interpretation of myth. It was felt that religion, poetry and philosophy are divergent expressions of the same truth, and only those with the ability to decipher its code of 'symbols' and 'enigmas' would attain it. Plutarch (40 – 120 A.D.) illustrates this point in his *De Iside et Osiride* (Griffiths 1970: 16), in which he traced the Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris:

> You know yourself that these tales do not at all resemble the flimsy stories and hollow figments such as poets and prose-writers weave and spread out before us, like spiders creating from themselves, as first principles which are quite unfounded; but rather that they contain narrations of trouble and suffering. Just as the scientists tell us that the rainbow is an image of the sun made brilliant by the reflection of its appearance into a cloud, so the present myth is the image of a reality which turns the mind back to other thoughts (*De Iside et Osiride* 358f-359a).

Myth is a discourse defined by double meaning. Its form has the potential to lead the mind to deeper, hidden truths, but like the sun refracting on the clouds it can only bring those hidden meanings, secreted within its form, to light indirectly. Hence, only those with the ability to decipher its symbolic code correctly can attain a higher, more profound truth. Before the rise of philosophical discourse, which can be defined as scientific thought, the discourse of myth was employed as a prime analytical and didactic tool by the Greeks. Philosophical discourse culminating in the works of Plato orchestrated a break with the mythic tradition by stating that myth (as chiefly conveyed through the discourse of poetry) purported a falsehood. Even though myth was labelled as irrational and unscientific, it could not be deemed unphilosophical, due to its dialectics disclosing notions concerned with truth, being, nature and meaning. Therefore, myth was retained and re-appropriated as a valid discourse within philosophy. Initially, philosophy found itself in a culture dominated by a very developed mythological tradition. Self-identification was made possible through placing their discourse of philosophy in opposition to that of myth.[8] The history of Greek attitude towards myth is one of rising complexity, based on a continuous reinterpretation and revalorization thereof. What should be noted are the universalistic and rationalistic tendencies Greek thinkers applied to myth. Most Greeks believed that foreign gods did not differ from their own, that they simply operated under another name due to a

[8] Although philosophy and myth can be viewed as two distinct discourses, the dialectical opposition they were placed in did not necessarily relate an either/or situation. In ancient Greek society the acceptance of either myth or philosophy as a form of knowledge about the world did not inevitably entail the negation of one or the other. Instead, this 'opposition' denotes various degrees of interrelation, in the sense that both discourses informed and complemented each other in what forms of knowledge about the world they conveyed. One example of how logic was applied to and informed mythology can be found in Plutarch's formulation regarding the universality of the gods.

change in context.[9] An example would be Plutarch equating the Egyptian god Osiris with that of the Greek Dionysus in his *De Iside et Osiride*. Generally, philosophers held atheism to be unconstructive, and raging debates centered not on the existence of the gods, which was not denied, but rather on the nature of the gods. Thus, the notions of universalism and rationalism, which are definitive of the western approach to myth[10] was already firmly established and developed within ancient Greek society.

2.3 DEFINITIONS OF MYTHS

The various approaches that ancient Greek society applied to their myths illustrate that there is no univocal definition thereof. The metaphors of Greek myth have been brooded upon, studied and analysed for centuries with no resultant Platonic form against which all variants can be measured. Myths differ not only according to culture and epoch, but also according to morphology and function. It is a global phenomenon postulating a range of complex cultural realities and semantic possibilities unique to each society. It is a social occurrence based on a shared semantic system that invites either collective or individual participation. In itself, myth can be defined as narratives marked with social approval, but should not be perceived as a closed system with the same characteristics in different

[9] Plutarch elaborates this Greek mindset succinctly " . . nor do we regard the gods as different among peoples nor as barbarian and Greek and as southern and northern. But just as the sun, moon, heaven, earth and sea are common to all, though they are given various names by the varying peoples, so it is with the one reason (*logos*) which orders these things and the one providence which had charge of them, and the assistant powers of which are assigned to everything: they are given different honours and modes of address among different peoples according to custom, and they use hallowed symbols, some of which are obscure and others clearer, directing the thought towards the divine. . ." (*De Iside et Osiride* 67, 377f).

[10] According to William Paden, a third definitive Occidental position towards myth is Biblical, an attitude which was to be developed at a later stage when the Christian tradition became a dominant ideology in the West (1994: 32).

cultures. For cultures differ; even neighbouring groups or sub-groups often have radically divergent traditions and beliefs.“The common preoccupations of mankind do not express themselves in the same way or the same proportion from culture to culture” (Kirk 1970: 28). Cultures are not analogous, and deviate on a material and social level. Each system of myth is therefore unique to a particular way of life. In a sense, myth is then a statement about life that is adaptable to the needs and fixations of the individual, culture and era. The realisation occurs that myth is a multifarious form, a structure open to continuous development that only allows for partial identification. From an analytical perspective myth has essentially been identified according to the tenets of anthropology, psychology, sociology and religion. As a result, what manner of interpretation you place on myth depends on the chosen documentation. Luckily, however, there is some common ground to start with in the *Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* (1989):

> **Myth** (mith), *n*. **1.** a traditional or legendary story, usually concerning some superhuman being or some alleged person or event, with or without determinable basis of fact or a natural explanation, esp., a traditional or legendary story that is concerned with deities or demigods and the creation of the world and its inhabitants. **2.** stories or matter of this kind: *in the realm of myth.* **3.** any invented story, idea or concept: *His rationalizations of his failings are pure myth*. **4.** an imaginary or fictitious thing or person. **5.** an unapproved collective belief that is accepted uncritically and is used to justify a social institution, as the belief in the biological inferiority of

slaves used in support of slave societies. [< LL *myth* (us) < Gk *mythos* story, word] **– Syn. 1.** See **legend.**

As seen above, myth as a general concept remains ambiguous and can be applied quite liberally to a number of meanings. However, the dictionary definition of myth does distinguish it as either being explicit or implicit. Implicit myth is grounded in the basic assumptions that are unique to each community or cultural group. Within all societies there are certain actions, expressions, images, words and objects that are emotionally charged and contain cores of meaning without having been put together in a clear-cut pattern, as in the case of explicit myth. Subsequently, implicit myth refers to unwritten social understandings that promote unity and cohesion throughout the group. They are free-floating collective beliefs that have not yet been fully developed but still give "meaning to the life of an individual or a community and on which people can fall back in situations of crisis" (Waardenburg 1980: 52). Waardenburg goes on to state that implicit myths often lead to "striking symbolisms which are adhered to beyond critical discourse", such as "different kinds of absolutized persecution and oppression, liberation and emancipation". Other examples would be images regarding brotherhood, solidarity, a longing for utopias or the fear of a coming Armageddon. Although these implicit notions can be developed into an explicit myth, they rather tend to be "assimilated into semi-rational systems called ideologies"(Waardenburg 1980: 55). In cases like these, implicit myth leads to a heightened awareness of, or sensitivity to, existing symbols. In contrast, explicit myth is a systematic symbolic adaptation used to convey a particular message or statement about life (Waardenburg 1980: 62). It tends to be more deliberate in its formulation and usually

consists of a sequence of stages and events endowing it with structure. By itself, explicit myth relates to narrative, but not just any narrative form. It refers to a very particular type of story.[11] Donna Rosenberg (1988: xiv) expounds the general trend of explicit myth as follows:

> Myths are serious stories that reflect a society's spiritual foundations. They are symbols of human experience that each culture values and preserves because they embody the world view or important beliefs of that culture. Myths may explain origins, natural phenomena, and death; they may describe the nature and function of divinities; or they may provide models of virtuous and heroic behaviour by relating the adventures of heroes. They may include legends as well as elements of folklore. They impart a feeling of awe for whatever is mysterious and marvellous in life, depicting a universe in which human beings take their place in a much larger scheme.

At its most basic level then, explicit myth represents stories about gods and other supernatural beings, but not all myths are concerned with gods or the supernatural. Therefore, explicit myth is often divided into several distinctions, for example myths dealing with the cosmos, aetiology, eschatology, or myths with a historical basis – all of which

[11] It should be noted that the prime focus of this thesis concerns the use of explicit myth, implicit myth will be touched on as it relates to the topics of discussion raised in the following chapters. These chapters, for the most part, are firstly concerned with explicit myth's potential to constitute a cultural reality, in the form of a living myth serving as foundation stone of a religion and the way of life it denotes; and secondly, the application of explicit myth locally in the context of South Africa as pertaining to *Afrikaner* society, stressing mostly the foundation myths of *Afrikanerdom* and how they were applied to constitute a Nationalist ideology. As such, implicit myth will largely be disregarded.

might include deities or demigods or not. Such narratives might include sagas, epics, legends, folkloristic tales or other traditional stories concerned with the creation and nature of the world. A distinction should be drawn, however, between what is considered a folktale and what a myth. Kirk defines folktales as “traditional tales, of no firmly established form, in which supernatural elements are subsidiary; they are not primarily concerned with ‘serious’ subjects or the reflection of deep problems and preoccupations; and their first appeal lies in their narrative interest” (1970: 37). Folktales are markedly non-specific and usually defined by a strong element of wish-fulfilment fantasy. Both folktales and myths are characterised by metaphorical thinking, but differ in their prime purpose. Myths often have a serious underlying agenda beyond that of telling a mere story. According to Joseph Campbell, a myth is for spiritual instruction, while a folktale is for entertainment (1989: 71). A folktale functions below the level of myth because it does not offer a deep structure of support to human life. Subsequently, myths can be grouped into two supportive categories, namely, those that relate “you to your nature and the natural world, of which you are a part”, and those that are “strictly sociological, linking you to a particular society. You are not simply a natural man, you are a member of a particular group” (Campbell 1989: 28).

Over time, a wide range of interpretations have been applied to these dual categories of myth. According to Kirk, the modern study of myth is primarily determined according to three approaches. “The first, was the realization that myths of primitive societies are highly relevant to the subject as a whole” illustrated by the likes of Franz Boas and Bronislaw Malinowski. “The second was Freud’s discovery of the unconscious and its relation to myths and dreams. The third is the structural theory of myth propounded by the French

anthropologist Claude Levi-Straus" (1970: 42). In the first case, notable anthropologists such as Franz Boas believed that "the incidents of human life that result in achievements are transferred to mythical beings" (1938: 616). Therefore, the systematization of a myth's morphology corresponds with the larger systematization of life and culture. The greater the systematization of a mythology, the more complex or abstract the paradox or tradition it tends to reflect. In this light, myth is both a conditioning process and a repository of information regarding custom, culture and nature (Boas 1938: 618). In turn, Bronislaw Malinowski viewed myths as a "statement of a higher and a more important truth, of a primeval reality, which is still regarded as the pattern and foundation of present-day life" (1963: 305). For him myths amount to a 'living reality', because they are thoroughly embedded in the morals, rites and social organization of a group. Malinowski, therefore, defines myth as a "charter of belief, rituals and ethics" that justifies a group's customs and social behaviour (1963: 303).

Claude Levi-Straus's structural analysis of myth resulted in a radical objectification thereof. He viewed myth as a product of language, placing it as one mode of human communication amongst others.[12] As with language, myth's meaning is not determined by its elements in isolation, but resides in their relation to each other. Consequently, the

[12] In viewing myth as a mode of communication myths constituted a form of language. Language to Levi-Strauss was the penultimate cultural manifestation, acquired by external tradition. It remains the essential way through which we assimilate group culture. To him all language consisted of systems comprised of codes formed by articulated signs that followed the pattern of linguistic communication (Charbonnier 1969: 150-151). Another theorist who also equated myth with a form of language was Roland Barthes. To him myth was a type of speech, but not just any type: "language of this kind needs special conditions for it to become myth. Speech of this kind is a message. It is therefore by no means confined to oral speech. It can consist of modes of writing or of representations; not only written discourse, but also photography, cinema, reporting, sport, shows, publicity, all these can serve as support to mythical speech" (1957: 109-110). Barthes, therefore defined myth as a metalanguage in its ability to constitute a discourse on other discourses. He saw myth as a system of communication and a mode of signification through which other languages and symbolic discourses could be described.

substance of myth lies neither in its content nor its narrative form. It is rather “the underlying structure that determines the real ‘meaning’ of myth, just as it is the underlying structure of language that gives it significance as a means of communication” (Kirk 1970: 42). In the end, myth is seen as postulating a structure that mediates contradictions and paradoxes through the constant reorganization of “traditional components in the face of new circumstances or, correlatively, in reorganizing new, imported components in light of tradition” (Maranda 1972: 8). As such, myth constitutes a learning device that not only makes the unintelligible known, but also reconciles social oppositions (1972: 8). And for it to function successfully it should always be apprehended in its totality since it is dialectic in its attempt to make cognitive sense out of the chaotic dynamics of culture and nature. It is the code in its entirety that myth imposes on the chaotic data provided by nature that gives significance, and since a code constitutes a structure, mythic thought is taken to be inherently structured.

The method of psychoanalysis and the discovery of the unconscious by Freud established a markedly inward interpretation of myth. Initially, myth as a form of symbolic expression was held to represent the external, natural world. The rise of the 20th century saw a noticeable change in attitude by focussing on inner realities rather than outer realities (Rosenberg 1988: xix). Due to Freud, myth was now regarded as symbolic productions of the internal environment of the human psyche. He proved that “images and symbols communicate their ‘messages’ even if the conscious mind remains unaware of” it (Eliade 1969: 6). Subsequently, following Freud's framework, myth cannot be deemed fictitious as is often the case in ordinary discourse, because it exists on its own plain of reference and constitutes a reality unique unto itself. In the context of psychoanalysis the fact that myths

do not refer to the world of immediate experience is barely taken into consideration. Following the psychoanalytical trend, Carl Jung elaborated the interpretation of myth into a manifestation of what he termed the collective unconscious. According to him, the collective unconscious is universal and not individual. It is innate in each individual, not based on personal experience or acquisition, but contains “contents and modes of behaviour that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals”. It “constitutes a common psychic substrate of a supra-personal nature which is present in every one of us” (Jung 1959: 4). The collective unconscious manifests itself in myth through the expression of archetypes. Archetypes are representations of elementary ideas, primordial or archaic types, and constitute patterns of behaviour that have existed from the earliest of times (1959: 5). Placed in this context, myth can be defined as a universal expression, “symptomatic of archetypal urges within the depths of the human psyche” (Campbell 1956: 382).

Explicit myth, whether it has been distinguished from its implicit counterpart and folktales, still designates a very broad field of enquiry. It varies greatly in scale of expression and range of symbolic meaning. The three foremost approaches to myth, whether anthropological, structural or psychological, are indicative of the frenetic search of the meaning of myth in the West. The last hundred and fifty years have seen a great deal of scholarly interpretation of myth. One of the most prominent voices to rise out of its dialectics is Joseph Campbell. If myths, at their most basic level are stories about gods, then to Campbell the first question that should be asked is ‘what is a god’? To him, a god is a “personification of a motivating power or value system that functions in human life and

the universe – the powers of your own body and of nature" (1989: 28). He sees myths as metaphorical of the spiritual potentiality in the human being. If myth is viewed as a 'motivating power' or a 'spiritual potentiality' it can be construed as a statement about action: myth functions as a living metaphor that gives you perspective on the actions you take and the actions of the world. As a generalist in the field of comparative mythology, Joseph Campbell viewed myth as a "secret opening in the universe through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation" (1956: 3). Although he was criticised for dwelling too much on the psychological aspects of myth (Moyers 1989: XX), his general approach towards the subject is appropriate to the discussion of the function of myth, since he tends to focus on concerns that are "more genuinely human, than specifically cultural" (Campbell 1989: 11).

1.4 FUNCTIONS OF MYTHS

A myth functions best when it is culturally embedded and active within the life of a community. In such instances it is deemed alive,[13] since it propounds a working, breathing cultural reality based on the participation in a shared symbolic field. From the perspective

[13] It should be noted that explicit myth is further differentiated into either living or tired myth. Living myth is active within the life of a community, it is social in character and tends to play a significant role in marking the identity of a particular individual or social group. One obvious way of identifying living myth is in its association with a cult that inspires and justifies religious behaviour. Myth, therefore, forms the foundation of religious life, and as such does not indicate a *fiction*, but is rather considered to "reveal the *truth par excellence*" (Eliade 1969: 73). It postulates a certainty that amounts to a complex social actuality endowed with a multiplicity of functions. In contrast, tired myth, are myths that no longer function within a society or culture. The symbols and metaphors employed by these myths are exhausted due to a lack of re-innovation and recreation, consequently the semantic potentialities become static and are no longer applicable to a culture in flux. The myth dies (Campbell: 1989: 72). A myth in this sense is equivalent to a dead metaphor. Another expression of tired myth, is when a society becomes obsessed with a particular mythology to a detrimental degree, or when a society becomes weary of the mythical elements conveyed by a mythology, a myth then becomes oppressive and constitutes a myth of domination.

of social semiotics[14] myth constitutes a symbolic language that creates a code within culture. With relation to myth the notion of language is applied more broadly than usual and is here taken to stipulate a codified system of representation. Since myth spans a variety of representational modes it tends to form a diversity of codes and sub-codes that permeate all layers of social strata. A society's relationship towards its myth is characterised by a rising complexity and interconnectivity, for just as myth changes socially it also constitutes a vehicle for social change. In this regard myth is both interpreter and creator of cultural realities. Through the act of defining realities the symbols myth employ serve ideological functions that are felt in both the macro and micro spheres of culture. Prominent ideologies illustrated by myth suggest that not all representations of reality are considered equal within a society. This indicates that cultural reality as founded on a particular ideology is something that is constructed and maintained by the social group through the participation in myth. The symbolic aspect of myth permeates society on both private and social levels. Symbols are internalised culturally and individually, maintaining a symbolic inheritance from the past that is continuously being extended into the future. Every symbol employed by myth acquires a history of connotations that are familiar to its sign users, and within the social sphere these mythical symbols can be applied to fulfil a multiplicity of functions on a variety of levels. A symbol in myth, therefore, can denote differing levels of complexity simultaneously, since the way it is employed and the function it fulfils within the lives of individual members of society tend to be determined subjectively.

For the most part, myth as a symbolic language, according to Joseph Campbell, fulfils four prime functions: “the first is the mystical – realizing what a wonder the universe is, and what a wonder you are, and experiencing awe before the mystery. Myth opens the world to a dimension of mystery, to the realization of the mystery that underlies all forms” (1989:

[14] In its shortest definition semiotics refers to the study of signs as developed by both the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1923) and the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914). de Saussure and Peirce respectively denote the two primary traditions or tendencies within contemporary semiotics. However, the term 'semiotics' has become the rubric that the whole field of semiotic study has been placed under, of which social semiotics specifically refers to the study of signs in particular social situations. As such, signs are not studied in isolation but rather as part of semiotic 'sign systems' in order to formulate how meaning is made and reality represented specific to a particular society (Chandler 2007: 2-3).

38). The symbols of myth, therefore, function as metaphors for what lies beyond the visible world. The second function is cosmological, showing you the shape of the universe, its contour and character, what it consists of and the nature of who inhabits it. The third function, the sociological, informs you of your social environment and your place in the hierarchy thereof. In this sense, myth is usually applied to validate and support a particular social order. The fourth function is pedagogical, and asserts that myth teaches you "how to live a human lifetime under any circumstances" (1989: 39). Since the scientific has come to replace the mythic in a variety of these functions, this last function of myth has ever remained a particular point of fascination and relevance to modern society.

Under these four functions myth fulfils a great many roles. Whether myth is considered to be a repository of information regarding culture and its traits, a charter guiding a people's moral, social and metaphysical behaviour, a group dream indicative of the collective unconscious, or as asserting spiritual principles that have remained constant in the face of human development, myth generally endures because of the multivalent qualities of its representations. As symbols they exhibit a certain degree of openness "for they represent variables, [and as such] can be linked to highly unpredictable contents" (Eco 2005: 141). Therefore, at any given moment a symbol in myth constitutes a state of potential, capable of activating a cluster of content. Symbols are deemed obscure because of this potentiality for carrying secondary meanings, which illustrates a logic different from that of ordinary language. Symbolic and ordinary language comprise two different planes of expression. As a channel of information and communication, knowledge and observations regarding the world as mediated through symbols are experienced differently from that of ordinary

language. Since what is experienced is primarily influenced by how it is represented, mythical symbols may constitute one of the fundamental signs through which reality could be categorized, and, according to Barthes has a double function: “it points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us” (1957: 117). For Barthes myth indicated a higher order of signification; he saw it as constituting a metalanguage comprised of ideological narratives, reflecting the dominant concepts supporting particular worldviews (1957: 124-6). Symbols in myth are socially determined, flexible and efficient and speak of “the affective meaning that runs through the relations that bind men together in a common, social world” (Gillan 1982: 27). Myth can be taken as a symbolic construction of reality, since it is recognized that “mythical thinking is a mode of symbolically structuring the world” (Cohen 1969: 340). As society exhibits a state of constant motion, this 'symbolic construction of reality' is subject to change. Variations in historical and socio-cultural conditions will result in certain modifications in representation, and alterations to values that a society's myths might propound, since symbols “must be generally accepted by the group, community, or society in order to persist and . . . there must be a certain consensus on their meaning for them to be effective” (Waardenburg 1980: 47). Humanity shows great potential for transforming and manipulating mythic contents in the light of new circumstances. For example, in the case where particular mythologies come in contact with alien cultures myth tends to destabilize. Its symbols are in a sense liberated from their previous set functions, enhancing the possibility for new connotations as particular symbols are appropriated within new discourses. On another level, changes in material conditions of society often call for the development of new, grand metaphors which are generally either appropriated or placed alongside older

ideologies, or can constitute a new ideology within their own symbolic framework and context of use. In contemporary culture the notion of the superhero, stardom and celebrity have come to constitute their own bold symbols actively embedded within most societies. Through mass media and the dynamics of techno-culture these abstractions and the metaphorical representations of the world they reflect have been reified by constant repetition. In contrast to mythology in its more traditional forms, Marilyn Monroe, Diana, Madonna[15] and Superman[16] have now come to embody their own myths in popular culture, each postulating a set of allegorical values that individuals of society could associate with.

For the most part, symbolic representation in myth is highly dynamic due to its sequential nature; in a way it could be called a 'moving symbolism'.

> These symbolizations together indicate the meaning of myth, which in the most cases is proclaimed to be the truth upon which the ordinary world and immediate reality or parts of it are based, so that through the myth, world and life can be seen in their real nature. . . At

[15] These figures have become iconic within the framework of contemporary culture. The myths associated with them could be deemed fundamentally new in the history of Western society. Marilyn Monroe, Diana and Madonna have become objects of adoration and cult obsession similar to icons often found in religious practice. They have become elevated, functioning as both image and individual in popular imagination. In the case of Marilyn Monroe, her mythical persona was for the most part deliberately constructed. According to P. David Marshall the “film star aura was . . . built on a dialectic of knowledge and mystery. The incomplete nature of the audience's knowledge of any screen actor became the foundation on which film celebrity was constructed into an economic force” (cited in Herwitz 2008: 16).

[16] In 1933 Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster created Superman. Published by DC Comics, Superman exemplified a new heroic formula previously unheard of and was the first major character of this so-called superhero genre.“The superhero is an apparently ordinary man or woman who reveals extraordinary abilities by donning a dramatic costume to assist the less able/competent authorities in protecting civilians” (Murphy 2006: 6). Over time the superhero genre had become so popular that it constituted a staple of American culture. Murphy goes on to mention that the widespread dissemination of 'mainstream' American comics by the comics industry ensured that many of “the American costumed superheroes became cultural icons [like Superman] through the repetition of these successful forms” (2006: 4).

> any given moment a symbol can start working and a mythical element can become active. What kind of reality is then put into motion or is manifesting itself? Both symbol and myth claim to give access to reality, either by particular words, visible objects, and actions or by stories. The superficial judgement that symbol and myth are not real is true only insofar as they are viewed as the simple indicators of reality. But myth and symbol provide access to reality of a different kind, and the answers they give to problems are not ready-made solutions for well-defined questions but have to do with problems of quite another kind (Waardenburg 1980: 53-63).

From a semiotic perspective, the notion of myth as merely representing an erroneous vision of the world does not hold true. Myth has the ability to enlarge and enrich our understanding of reality. Its “power and endurance” continues to reside “in its capacity to address and resolve conflicts and contradictions” within human experience (Paden 1994: 90). Contradictions and conflict arise from our constant interaction with reality, and myth responds to confrontation. As symbolic narrative, myth constitutes a dynamic form of mediation that reconciles nature and culture, harmonizing individual and society within its environment as a whole. For Joseph Campbell myths continuously provide symbols “that carry the human spirit forward” (1956: 11). Herbert Mason equates this notion with myth not leading to a journey into the self, but rather necessitating a journey out of the self (1980: 16). The encounter of realities *other* than the self forces individuals to leave the isolation of their personal perspectives and may result in an expansion of conciousness. Each mythical symbol represents its own semantic structure that functions as a conceptual

metaphor through which other conceptual domains could be understood, constituting one way through which a society and its members may gain access to their experience of the world. Different symbols necessarily allude to different experiences, and as such may postulate new possibilities of meaning regarding the world previously unknown to an individual. Myth broadens the horizons of perception and understanding, opening reality into a transcendent world mediated through meaning and mystery. On the other hand, myths that detract from reality are those of domination. These myths propound a closed system because they are caught in their own metaphors and only allow for reality to be judged according to a single angle. In such cases, myths do not move beyond their own point of reference and worldviews are narrowed, which results in a loss of semantic potential (Waardenburg 1980: 58).

On a final note, since this dissertation discusses the use of myth by creative artists such as Neil Gaiman and Conrad Botes, it would be advantageous to look at how mythic symbols might function in the realm of art. The large-scale proliferation of the visual image and the culture of the book seems to be somewhat characteristic of contemporary society. Though these do not constitute the only modes of representation regarding the mytho-symbolic they constitute a prominent focus in the context of comics arts, which is both a verbal and visual medium, and as such, Botes and Gaiman's use of comic-art seems to be situated neatly between these two categories. As has been mentioned, myth is a very complex sign-system that permeates culture, influencing all levels of social strata. A myth is denotative of a particular worldview and is therefore seen as propagating an ideological framework. The representations of myth, in this case primarily visual, have the potential to

further the signification of a specific ideology if its mythic symbols are employed within new contexts, which tend to broaden its previous semantics. In a society where knowledge of the world is for the most part mediated by advanced communication and media technologies, symbols are widely used as constituting a vehicle of communication. This results in the widespread transference of symbols, mythic or not, to all social spheres, whether public or private. Mythical symbols, therefore, migrate not only from culture to culture and discourse to discourse, but also from text to text. Artists as commentators of society are well situated for the shaping, manipulation and extension of myth to new contexts. In contemporary society Joseph Campbell saw the role of the artist to also communicate myth.

> Myth must be kept alive. The people who can keep it alive are artists of one kind or another. The function of the artist is the mythologization of the environment and world (Campbell 1989: 107). [And] for a culture . . . nurtured in mythology the landscape, as well as every phase of human existence, [becomes] alive with symbolical suggestion (1956: 43).

For Campbell myths are very important to the vitality of cultures. Those artists who are elaborators of myth may potentially sustain communities by conveying “in and through mythical story, a precise message in symbolic form which can be translated back into terms of ordinary life” (Waardenburg 1980: 54). By turning objects and forms into symbols, the ordinary could be endowed with psychological significance, transmuting the mundane into transcendence. The contemplation of mythical imagery, which Campbell saw as

“reflections of the spiritual potentialities” of humanity, could evoke the powers they represent within our own lives (1989: 258). Following this notion, the elaboration of mythic symbols by artists might potentially elicit some sense of spiritual fulfilment in members of society, especially since humanity tends to be more than just the sum of its material circumstances. If the mythical symbols employed by artists deny notions of egotism, nihilism, alienation, despair and impotence, they may form a break in mundane existence and potentially cure the sterility of ordinary life. By reacquainting members of society with the mythic underpinnings of their culture, artists could arouse some understanding of the inner workings and sense of coherence particular to each tradition. In this regard, the often revolutionary, disruptive and creative powers of art help individuals to not just blindly follow the norms of society, but facilitate a conviction based on a deeper understanding that aids them in living authentic lives. Consequently, artistic works are important because they “encourage freedom of interpretation, [offering] us a discourse that has many layers of reading and plac[ing] before us the ambiguities of language and of real life” (Eco 2005: 4). Artistic endeavours tend to expand and amplify myth across domain and discourse, ensuring that the present application of myth never stems from the total negation of the past, nor is it reduced to the simple repetition thereof.

2.5 CONCLUSION

The use of analogy as a means to define the world is inherent in every cultural system. Classification through comparison and correlation is a constant phenomenon within the sphere of human activity. Myths amount to an organizing principle with the potential to revitalize life. Across cultures, they constitute a conceptual structure of unlimited variations

and content. As a result, themes and narratives often seem comparable even if cultures diverge. However, each mythology is unique. Over time, myths amalgamate into complex structures particular to each society, and although metaphors might seem shared, they differ in application from context to context. Disregarding the particular for a moment, the universality of myth and its commonality of themes do indicate, according to Campbell, a "constant requirement of the human psyche for centering in terms of deep principles" (Moyers 1989: xvi). Campbell brings to light an insight that is of particular relevance to each and every individual no matter what day or age.

Lastly, the analysis of myth with regards to Greek society shows that theories about the meaning of myth were already expounded as early as the 6th century B.C. Whether it was used in a negative sense, or a positive one, was partly based on semantics and partly on attitude. Therefore, in relation to discursive language, myth may appear as either "something that is less than factual or something that is sublimely transrational" (Paden 1994: 70). Whether myth may be taken as either profound or imaginary, the fact remains that the metaphors through which it operates has shaped cultures and cultural traits from antiquity onwards. It has served whole societies as a mainstay of both thought and life, postulating a conceptual framework that integrates "the individual into his society and society into the field of nature" (Campbell 1989: 66).The symbols employed by myth have been brooded upon, searched and discussed for centuries. The trend continues in modernity, where innumerable postulations and definitions of myth by influential theorists have carried its semantics into the twenty-first century. It is said that myth paved the way for systematic thought through its dialectics of truth, being and meaning (Eliade 1969:x);

however, it seems that systematic thought has resulted in the death of myth. Though the rationalization of myth in ancient Greece did not result in a dramatic desacralisation thereof, the secular and rationalist tendencies established by prominent Greek philosophers have escalated into modern times, and if applied to myth often brings about a radical demystification thereof.

3. DESACRALIZATION AND THE MIGRATION OF MYTHS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Following the previous chapter, the broad analysis of myth with regards to its origin, definition and function illustrates that it is a vibrant cultural construct that cannot be deemed passive, since its perception simultaneously results in participation. Much speculation usually surrounds the root of a particular myth or mythology, especially in non-literate cultures. Though related properties might be shared between mythologies, it is highly doubtful whether myth originates and develops in a similar manner. At best it seems, that in those cultures where sufficient documentation does exist, it is possible to trace the application and usages of myth specific to the context of a particular culture. Whether myth is used as a rhetorical tool, a fiction or applied as a divine truth indirectly expressed by the gods, the differing utilizations of myth, as with the ancient Greeks, brings to light the varied modes of its expression. Myth's nature is not static and constitutes a symbolic language that retains special qualities no matter divergences in morphology or function. A society's myths, whether implicit or explicit, contain values and ideals specific to its culture, successfully tying it to the heritage of its past and with the potential of shaping its future. A myth might well be defined as an overarching narrative specific to a culture, stipulating a totality that both discloses and limits knowledge about the world. For Jean Francois Lyotard knowledge about the world in contemporary society is chiefly propagated through the discourses of science and narrative (1984: 7). He equated myths with constituting either grand or meta-narratives that chiefly expounded notions regarding legitimation or the speculative unity of knowledge.

> In contemporary society and culture – postindustrial society, postmodern culture – the question of the legitimation of knowledge is formulated in different terms. The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation. The decline of narrative can be seen as an effect of the blossoming of techniques and technologies since the Second World War, which has shifted emphasis from the ends of action to its means (Lyotard 1984: 37).

The rise of scientific knowledge and the technological advancements it has brought about has placed the state of grand narratives under duress. Lyotard also mentions that the lamentation of the 'loss of meaning' in “postmodernity boils down to mourning the fact that knowledge is no longer principally narrative” (1984: 26). Consequently, myths as stipulating totalities are placed in a state of crisis, since the condition of postmodernity in contemporary society markedly tends to disband or partially disband grand narratives (Lyotard 1984: 15). From this perspective, myths are destabilised in that the knowledge about the world they propagate are now placed alongside their scientific counterpart. Tendencies of rationalisation and secularisation remove the emotional emphasis usually attached to myth. The link with religious relativity and new ideas and formulations regarding the world as postulated by prominent thinkers and scientists generally results in the loss of myth's hold on society. Compared to the elaborate formulations of explicit myth in latter times, “mythical symbolism now seems to grow wild. In addition to the

communications media and publicity explosion one can observe today the attempt to make use of symbol and myth by all sorts of diffuse interests" (Waardenburg 1980: 56).

With the above mentioned points in mind, this chapter is primarily concerned with the migration of mythologies. Myths are not only transferred from culture to culture and text to text, but they also tend to shift domains as they are appropriated within new discourses. The focus of this chapter falls on myth's ability to engender a living, breathing cultural reality, most notably expressed in the context of religion. It follows that Lyotard's conception regarding the disintegration and loss of credibility of grand narratives reflect transformations within western society that have resulted in some tendencies toward desacralisation in the Occident. Rationalistic and secular trends as developed by prominent thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzche and Karl Marx may well have added to the loss of myth's hold on Western society, which in some respects makes for an easier appropriation of its discourse into other domains, for example fiction. This, however, has not brought about the end of myth, for new myths continuously develop as the material conditions of society changes, but merely illustrates a change in status of certain mythical cosmologies, since what was once deemed truth, or even ultimate truth, has now migrated into the realm of story.

3.2 THE SACRED

Myths define certain aspects of society and nowhere are the values central to a society more clearly expressed than in its dominant religion. Although the language of religion is equated with myth, ritual and the sacred, it should be noted that not all myths are

necessarily sacred or associated with religion (Kirk 1970: 19). Regarding the purposes of this chapter religion represents a viable, functioning mythical expression and as such establishes a living myth. Living myths are culturally embedded and active within the life of a community, they tend to be widespread, they take on different expressions and are not merely restricted to religion. If, however, the topic of discussion falls on the desacralisation of society then religion seems to be the most obvious place to start, since its dialectics are primarily orientated towards the sacred. When explicit myth gains a religious quality it tends to produce a cult, which is extremely important to the concept of religion since it inspires and justifies religious behaviour. According to William Paden, religion is generally "used to mean a system of language and practice that organizes the world in terms of what is deemed sacred" (1994: 10). In the West religion generally denotes "God", but in recent times this defining referent has been replaced by the *Sacred*. This modern appropriation constitutes a term that assumes "neither the reality nor unreality of what is considered sacred, but simply [states] the fact that people do take certain beings, traditions, principles or objects to be sacred and these serve in turn as the organizing points of reference for defining their world and lives" (Paden 1994: 11). Religion as a phenomenon cannot merely be defined according to what people believe, since it postulates a dynamic cultural reality that is not only lived and breathed and shared, but it also conditions the way people perceive and interpret existence. Religion denotes a particular way of living in the world that is informed by both myth and ritual in reference to the sacred. Myth shapes religion through image and representation, and therefore serves as the basis of religious practice, constituting a form of human behaviour and language. Living myth as the basis of religion articulates the foundations of the sacred. It shapes a

particular expression of human behaviour and language that is chiefly orientated towards the experience of the sacred. The sacred can have any form, but often reflects the conceptual needs of a community, and therefore, what is deemed sacred is always culturally located. According to Mircea Eliade, a major twentieth century figure in the phenomenology of religion,

> . . . the awareness of a real and meaningful world is intimately related to the sacred. Through the experience of the sacred, the human mind grasped the difference between that which reveals itself as real, powerful, rich and meaningful, and that which does not – i.e., the chaotic and dangerous flux of things, their fortuitous, meaningless appearances and disappearances (Eliade 1969: x).

For him “man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane” (1957: 11). He equates the sacred with those elements and experiences that have sustained and remained constant within human life, in contrast to those which profane and destroy life. The sacred serves as a point of reference in a profane and chaotic existence based on the fluxing realities of society's complexity and change. As such, religion ontologically founds the world since it articulates what is deemed true and absolute in the face of a transitory universe. The various manifestations of the sacred as expressed in myth, ritual and symbol “reveal an absolute reality” that founds the world “in the sense that it fixes the limits and establishes the order of the world” (1957: 30).

> It is for this reason that myth is bound up with ontology; it speaks only of *realities*, of what *really* happened, of what was fully manifested. Obviously these realities are sacred realities, for it is the *sacred* that is pre-eminently the *real*. Whatever belongs to the sphere of the profane does not participate in being, for the profane was not ontologically established by myth, has no perfect model. . . No god, no culture hero ever revealed a profane act. Everything that the gods or ancestors did, hence everything that the myths have to tell about their creative activity, belongs to the sphere of the sacred and therefore participates in *being*. . . This is the aspect of myth that demands particular emphasis here. The myth reveals absolute sacrality, because it relates the creative activity of the gods, unveils the sacredness of their work. In other words, the myth describes the various and sometimes dramatic irruptions of the sacred into the world. . . It is the irruption of the sacred into the world, an irruption narrated in the myths, that *establishes* the world as a reality. Every myth shows how a reality came into existence, whether it be the total reality, the cosmos, or only a fragment – an island, a species of plant, a human institution (Eliade 1957: 95-97).

The foundational realities that myth either creates or expresses are by nature participatory and involving, since they tend to be assimilated into the broader perspective of culture and have the capacity to influence human behaviour. They have been experienced and lived,

enriched and transformed across cultures and time. Though the sacred relates a universal dimension, it should be noted that what is deemed sacred within a culture is positional, relational and relative to social and religious location. However, no matter where the sacred is situated, myth does function as a world-constituting language, especially within living religious systems. It does not only deal with the “merely technical question of how things came into existence [but also] exposits the overall sacred purposes and values of things”(Paden 1994: 72). A mythology then, in its totality, proclaims a scale of values, both implicit and explicit, orientating an individual in terms of what the world is based on, what forces and principles determine the world and also create, maintain and animate the individual's existence. Myth is considered fundamental as it “explains and by the same token justifies, the existence of the world, man and society”(Eliade 1969: 76). It is viewed as constituting a “*true history* [since it] relates how things came into being, providing an exemplary model and also justifications of man's activities”(Eliade 1969: 76). Myth is experienced “not simply as our own projection and instrumentality but as a worldview and semantic matrix in its own right, organizing and presenting reality in a way that makes humans not just conceivers but respondents and partakers” of those founding principles deemed sacred to the world (Paden 1994: 74). The sacred by definition engages us, existing behind ordinary life and supporting it. Whether it is conceived as heavenly or historical, its ageless and exemplary nature will always remain a source of healing, liberation, power and restoration.

In contemporary society life seems less governed by rich and powerful foundational principles. The sacred has been replaced by the necessities and obligations of living in an industrialised society. Scientific thought and rationalism, if applied to the context of religion

as discussed, tend to demystify the numinous, transforming the world into something inert and opaque. For figures such as Carl Jung, Mircea Eliade and Joseph Campbell, secularisation has detached societies from their grounding myths and traditions, confining life to a mere mode of being that communicates only our own subjective consciousness. Discoveries in chemistry and physics have emptied the cosmos of the mystifying and inscrutable. What was once deemed sacred and life-constituting has now, through the discourse of science, been reduced to mere matter pliable to our will. “As scientific understanding has grown”, states Carl Jung, “so our world has become dehumanized” (Jung 1968: 85). For Jung, all our gods and demons have been thoroughly rationalised and humanity, in general, has lost its emotional connection with nature and natural phenomena. All that was held holy by common consent is lost in the rise of the individual. Mysteries have lost their force. The power and glory have been removed from once-potent words and gestures.

> Man today is painfully aware of the fact that neither his great religions nor his various philosophies seem to provide him with those powerful animating ideas that would give him the security he needs in face of the present condition of the world. His moral and spiritual tradition has disintegrated, and he is now paying the price for this break-up in worldwide disorientation and disassociation (Jung 1968: 84-92).

This relates directly to Lyotard's notion that the 'loss of meaning' in post-industrial society can be equated with the fact that knowledge is no longer solely conveyed through narrative means. Grand narratives, whether postulated by philosophy or religion, that once

stipulated a semblance of 'truth' about the world in their separate discourses, have now come to loose some of their credibility. Within this context, the great myths of dominant religions have degenerated to a point of caricature, and for Mircea Eliade they are now expounding a debased spirituality. Entire conceptions of myths, rituals, beliefs and institutions have been progressively expunged of meaning. Eliade states that modern man has assumed a new existential situation; “he regards himself solely as the agent of history, and he refuses all appeal to transcendence. The sacred is the prime obstacle to his freedom. He will become himself only when he is totally demysticised. He will not be truly free until he has killed the last god” (Eliade 1957: 203). If a god embodies a motivating power or a system of values in life and society, then killing a god naturally entails destroying those elements that give vitality and meaning to life[17] (Campbell 1989: 28). An insignificant life embodies a reduced existence and may well lead to doubt of the overall meaning of existence.

> Why, then, should we deprive ourselves of views that would prove helpful in crises and would give meaning to our existence? And how do we know that such ideas are not true? Many people would agree with me if I stated flatly that such ideas are probably illusions. What they fail to realize is that the denial is as impossible to “prove” as the assertion of religious belief. We are entirely free to choose which point of view we take; it will in any case be an arbitrary decision.

[17] It is interesting to note that Joseph Campbell also viewed gods as metaphorical of the spiritual potentialities in the human being (1989: 28). In this respect the act of 'killing a god' and the demystification of the self could be seen as an act of destruction regarding the self. Ways through which certain aspects of the self could be understood, like the symbolic representation of a god for example, are now negated since the act of 'killing a god' relates the destruction of those possibilities through which the self could be known.

> There is, however, a strong empirical reason why we should cultivate thoughts that can never be proved. It is that they are known to be useful. Man positively needs general ideas and convictions that will give meaning to his life and enable him to find a place for himself in the universe. He can stand the most incredible hardships when he is convinced they make sense; he is crushed when, on top of all misfortunes, he has to admit that he is taking part in a "tale told by an idiot" (Jung 1968: 72).

In contemporary society a loss of faith regarding religion is often evident. Although this is not a definitive occurrence in all social spheres, it does hold sway generally, since in the context of traditional mythology the symbols of assimilation and integration in some myths have been destabilised and the once potent inner realities they conveyed have faded into mere form. If an organising principle such as mythology, which constitutes a storyfication of physical and psychological phenomena, loses its credibility then it may well lead to disillusionment, loss of faith and despondency. The religion it carried loses integrity as a determining standard taking along with it the validity of the institutions, conventions and knowledge it supported, resulting in large-scale disenchantment since its rationale can no longer be reinforced. Fortunately, though these tendencies of desacralisation have reduced the state of religion[18] and brought about the collapse of some of its mythical symbolisms, the spiritual symbolisation of our civilisation is not lost to us.

[18] Although desacralisation is evident in Western culture and does, in a sense, relate an overarching move away from religion as the basis of knowledge regarding the world, it should be noted that desacralisation does not relate the complete negation of faith and religious practice in contemporary society. As always there are exceptions to this rule and many peoples do still maintain a 'sacred' belief system founded on narrative myth. Furthermore, there has also been a marked rise in fundamentalist belief systems, documented in the occurrence of Islamofascism or fundamentalist Christianity for example.

3.2.1 NIETZSCHE AND (DE)SECULARISATION

> For the democratic ideal of the self-determining individual, the invention of the power-driven machine, and the development of the scientific method of research, have so transformed human life that the long-inhereted, timeless universe of symbols has collapsed. . . there is no such society as the gods once supported. The social unit is not a carrier of religious content, but an economic-political organization. Its ideals are not those of a hieratic pantomime, making visible on earth the forms of heaven, but of a secular state, in hard and unremitting competition for material supremacy and resources. Isolated societies, dreambounded within a mythologically charged horizon, no longer exist except as areas to be exploited. And within the progressive societies themselves, every last vestige of the ancient human heritage of ritual, morality, and art is in full decay (Campbell 1956: 387-388).

Friedrich Nietzsche termed this occurrence the *death of god* (1969: 41). As a prominent figure in 19th century German philosophy he held that man killed God. Since Western society is comprised of three dominant faiths represented by Judaic, Christian and Islamic ideologies, the notion of 'God' generally constitutes a defining if not dominant referent in Occidental consciousness. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* which Nietzsche considered his greatest work (Kee 1999: 8), he engaged his most popular fictional creation, the godless

prophet Zarathustra, as mouthpiece of this gospel and prime protagonist in his formulations on 19th century Europe as influenced by Christendom. Nietzsche employed the death of god not as referent of the demise of some supernatural entity, but to relate specifically to the end of a cultural context in Europe as defined by Judeo-Christian principles. For him the journey began not with the question of whether god existed or not, but rather with the loss of religious faith. Subsequently, the death of god embodies a radical metaphor that refers to cultural change. It represents a complex cultural movement characterised by a loss of religious belief and accordingly the cessation of participation in institutionalised forms of religion. Nowadays we refer to this occurrence or change in Western culture as secularization. Nietzsche anticipated these secular tendencies spreading relentlessly over his contemporary landscape even though he lived in an age when the majority of the population was still in favour of religion (Kee 1999: 28). Nietzsche did foresee a time when the scale would tip in favour of the irreligious, and if he "had lost his faith then he would not continue to live in a world built upon religious presuppositions, as if nothing had fundamentally changed" (Kee 1999: 27-28). To Nietzsche a loss of religious faith held extensive ramifications, one of which being that modern man must henceforth live exclusively in an immanent godless world.

> Have you not heard of the madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly: "I seek God! I seek God!" - As many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Has he got lost? Asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? Asked another.

Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? Emigrated? - Thus they yelled and laughed.

The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. "Wither is God?" he cried; "I will tell you. *We have killed him* – you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy

> of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whoever is born after us – for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto. . .” (Nietzsche 1974: 181).

According to Nietzsche, the death of god related the end of a final organizing principle that has defined and remained constant throughout Western culture (1974: 181). In a culture where it was deemed that morality came from god and not from man, the implication of living in a world where god has died could result in the collapse of European tradition as justified by the absolute (God). For Nietzsche, this loss of foundation inherently implies the loss of truth, morality and aesthetic judgement, since the values considered intrinsic to Western culture are no longer confirmed by a transcendent setting (Kee 1999: 29). The loss of this fixed, timeless, changeless divine frame of reference, which formerly achieved several things at once, such as “the integrity of the subject, the guarantee that there is a true knowledge of the subject, and the availability of a norm against which our partial provisional knowledge can be judged” could leave man at a loss for direction since the grounding foundations of epistemology, aesthetics and morality have been removed (1999: 46). This shows to what extent a living myth postulates a cultural reality and embeds itself within it, since “religious language and behaviour are not just beliefs and acts about the world, but actual ways through which” a particular world or worldview “comes into being” (Paden 1994: 54). With the death of god and demise of religion a world came to an end, but with the fall of one world, Nietzsche saw the possibility of creating another, one in which the radical destruction of ideals and the end to absolute truth in its religious and metaphysical forms would not necessarily lead to nihilism consequent on the loss of

meaning. He did not anticipate a world in which the religious and secular continue to share in a similar world-view[19] (Kee 1999: 30).

3.2.2 CLASSICAL MARXISM AND RELIGIOUS DISILLUSIONMENT

Classical Marxism relates to the social theory originated and expounded by Karl Marx and Friederich Engels, as contrasted with the later developments of Marxism. As a theory it aims to gain an encompassing understanding of the totality of social life (Joseph 2006: 1). Born in the Rhineland in1818 Karl Marx preceded Friedrich Nietzsche. Both figures, however, remain in prominence since their formulations are still useful in definition of the modern condition. Nietzsche and Marx share a connection in the sense that the culture they found themselves in was both morally and intellectually indebted to religion. Since this chapter is concerned with the destabilization of living myth as propounded by a functioning religion, it is interesting to note that both theorists held similar conceptions regarding the place of religion in society as the processes of secularization, rationalization and modernization intensifies. To both this entails the loss of any standard of measurement as based on previous traditional codes. Taken in the context of Marx's theoretical framework he states that the:

[19] For Nietzsche it was unforeseeable that people would still continue a worldview once it's truth-value has been negated. In the case of Western tradition as propounded by Judeo-Christian principles he did admit that remnants of religion would still influence current and coming times, but since they were devoid of value these forms necessarily had to him a limited shelf-life. He did not expect that the irreligious would participate in a worldview expounded by the religious, which is currently the mark of contemporary times, as such, I would say that the tensions between secular and religious values have been acutely felt in the consciousness of modern human beings (Kee 1999: 30). Especially since they are two expressions of consciousness situated at divergent ends in relation to each other, which in themselves do not constitute a direct opposition, but stipulate some resistance in the different modes of thinking they engender.

> constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguishes the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned. . . (The Communist Manifesto 1848-I18).

Now, whether this relates to the 'bourgeois epoch' or contemporary times, the statement holds true. Marx describes a world that is still recognizably our own, where impermanence has become the new permanence brought about by the incessant change that Capitalism leaves in its wake. For Marx then, the processes of labour determine man's consciousness, self-understanding and political and social relations of the time. Historical materialism, as a Marxist theory of social organization, in its most basic formulation states that society is organized around the dominant mode of production and that material practice ascertains the ideas of the age. As a result “the mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life” (Marx cited in Joseph 2006: 18). Marx's first critique of religion starts with the notion that the ruling ideas of society are the ideas of the ruling class.[20] To him religion was a form of social control, in that it stated that the world as it is is what it ought to be. Subsequently, Marx saw religion as reconciliation, since as an ideology it legitimised an unjust world

[20] This conception is elaborated in the *Communist Manifesto*, where Marx states: “What else does the history of ideas prove, than that the intellectual production changes its character in proportion as material production is changed? The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class” (2005: 68).

through aligning itself with the “values and interests of the oppressors against the oppressed” (Kee 1990: 39).

Marx's second critique of religion was strongly influenced by Ludwig Fauerbach's analysis of religion (Gasper 2005: 11-12). Ludwig Fauerbach was an influential German philosopher who worked in the tradition of classic German philosophy with its strong emphasis on the problem of human alienation and estrangement. For Fauerbach the problem of human alienation is best illustrated by religion, although it also exists in other secular forms. Accordingly, Fauerbach states that “man – this is the mystery of religion – projects his being into objectivity, and then again makes himself an object of this projected image of himself, thus converted into a subject” (cited in Kee 1990: 42). Fauerbach is of the opinion that man projects aspects of his being away from himself. As such, certain ideals and desires become objectified as the properties or attributes of God. “Since this is an unconscious activity, man's not aware that these attributes are actually human. The attributes now belong to God and not to man, and in their alienated and reified form act back on man to control and govern his life” (Kee 1990: 42). A reversal of reality occurs, since “man the subject and creator has now become the subject of God, his creation” (Kee 1990: 42). In this sense religion postulates an inverted world. For Fauerbach this manner of inversion was a source of mystery. Since a culture defines itself according to those values it recognizes as the properties of God, religion then humanizes society and the individual in the sense that it defends and applies those inherently human values projected onto God back onto man. Although greatly influenced by Fauerbach's theory of projection, Marx takes the opposite view in this matter; to him this inversion is a source of error. It construes a false image of man and leads to estrangement since it denies him the true

reality of himself (1990: 45). In this sense religion constitutes an error, a lie, a form of fantasy.[21] Marx removes himself further from Fauerbach's formulations in stipulating that the source of alienation does not lie in the realm of ideas or religious forms, but is rather found in the material realities of social life (Joseph 2006: 11). Religion then, as reversal, creates a mystifying picture of the world that shifts people's consciousness away from the problems of everyday life. Consequently, religion constitutes an ideology in the sense that it is an alienated form of consciousness that obfuscates, whilst carefully keeping the real relations of the world intact. To Marx, his second critique of religion as reversal of reality was much more important than his first critique of religion as reconciliation. The notion of religion as reversal served as the basis for his third and most influential critique of religion, namely; religion as ideology. For Marx, human conciousness is shaped by the material conditions of life. Consciousness as expressed in the notion of the truth of the world or the ruling ideas of society at the time does not exist independently as pure reason under the rubric of the Enlightenment, but instead is articulated according to cultural, political and social circumstances. Ideology is defined as “a form of consciousness, describing a set of ideas or beliefs, or different theories, outlooks and ways of seeing the world” (Joseph 2006: 14) and, according to Marx, men have hitherto:

> . . . always formed wrong ideas about themselves, about what they are and what they ought to be. They have arranged their relations according to their ideas of God, of normal man, etc. The products of their brains have

[21] Marx's formulation of religion as purporting a falsity corresponds well to Nietzsche's own view as stipulated in *The Gay Science*: “. . . that God is truth, that truth is divine. But what if this should become more and more incredible, if nothing should prove to be divine any more unless it were error, blindness, the lie – if God himself should prove to be our most enduring lie?” (1974: 283).

> got out of hands. They, the creators, have bowed down before their creations (cited in Kee 1990: 79-80).

In this case ideology has a negative connotation, because in Marxist interpretation “ideas about the world, about social relations, have been objectified and given independent reality over and against man” (Kee 1990: 80). Therefore, ideology constitutes a classic case of reversal. Following Marx, ideology as a mental construction is partial and misleading since the system of ideas it creates about the world are untrue or may not represent the whole picture. Ideologies constitute illusions with the ability to alter and create new states of consciousness. The end result however, is a false state of consciousness since it is based on mere fantasy (Kee 1990: 80). And since our production of ideas and formulations of consciousness are based on our material activities, this false consciousness created by ideology constructs and circulates a mistaken picture of reality, that, according to Marxist theory, promotes the material interests of those who produced it. In this regard ideology can be viewed as morally unjust. As a mental construct that is “concerned with the unity and reproduction of the social system [it generates] the necessary beliefs to ensure that humans act in the right ways”; in the context in which Marx found himself, ideology was analysed as a system that legitimised and disguised exploitation (Joseph 2006: 14).

3.3 MYTHICAL MIGRATIONS

So far, this chapter has looked at how a myth might postulate a living, breathing cultural reality, in this case exemplified in religion, and how that cultural reality could become

destabilised within the society it supports. This need not necessarily be applicable only to religion as constituting a dominant ideology, but holds true in its application to all myths generally. In contemporary society, current circumstances dictate conditions of mass-production, monopolization, mass-consumption, bureaucratisation, militarisation and rationalisation. Society has been turned into an open system where a variety of mechanisms operate in various combinations giving the world a multi-faceted nature. In the context of religion, these differing processes pertaining to the rationalisation and desacralisation of society occur on numerous levels, systematically transforming, for the most part, the sacred into the profane, on all spheres, whether economic, geographic, sociological or cosmological. When a myth's hold on society is destabilised or lost, it tends to be appropriated by other discursive domains. Myth tends to display certain migratory and transformational qualities that to some extent convey a principle of conservation regarding mythical material. In this respect myth often passes over other thresholds into other realms, one of which is fiction, according to critics like Thomas Pavel (1989: 41). He states that when a mythological system weakens or wanes it results in a domain-shift, causing that system to no longer convey the dimension of the 'pre-eminently real' as Mircea Eliade would have it (1957: 28), but rather one of fictionality. This usually happens when the mythology as a whole starts to lose its credibility. It tends to be a gradual process and there is no singular cause for its occurrence, as it often relates to a combination of factors, such as notions of religious relativity and various new alternatives expounded by scientists and philosophers, resulting in the slow detachment of society from its grounding myths. In the context of traditional mythology, its founding gods and ancient heroes would no longer be viewed as the living embodiment of core values

definitive of life and culture, constituting a primary universe, but rather as fictional entities embodying a secondary universe in the imagination of man. The cycle of demystification is brought to completion, since the ontological priority of a world based on the foundation of living myth is negated, no longer mediated and made real through aspects of faith. Myth has come to constitute a mere world of make-believe.

Under certain cultural conditions or pragmatic circumstances mythology is read under the rubric of fiction. This is not a once-off process, but constitutes unexpected mutations regarding interaction between sacred and profane ontologies. Once a mythology is considered fiction its sacred domain becomes crucially exposed to the unstable existence of the profane. As such, living myth as the foundation of a religious world no longer grants access to the sacred, since now it is viewed instead as narrative constituting a fictional world. Both fictional and religious worlds[22] are cultural constructs, but while the narrative of the former could be said to explore different modes of possibility, it is taken that the narrative of the latter presents the world as it 'really' is and gives meaning to life. Intrinsically then, both constructs constitute differentiated notions of being, and each as a system has its own logic, but once a religious world is viewed as fictional access to it no longer entails death to the profane condition (Eliade 1957: 201). If the label of 'fiction' “has been attributed, conventions dictating the status and proper interpretation of fictional propositions are activated” (Ronen 1994: 10)which results in a loss of integrity when applied and compared to myth in its original context of use.

[22] The metaphor of “world” is often applied as a neutral term and usually used to describe the semantic domain projected by a text. As such, its value is relativistic and it is up to the concept of modality to describe and classify the various elements that comprise the semantic domain, whether that constitutes what manner of manifestation they exhibit or how they are ordered.

Myth as a text is a source of knowledge from which we draw information to build our representation of the world. It is not just a means of labelling reality, but also of producing it, especially in regards to living myth, since it postulates a foundational reality that is considered undoubtedly real, complete and consistent. This notion falls flat when it is viewed as fiction.

> Fictional, fictive, fictitious: the variety of adjectives derived from the noun “fiction” is matched by the variety of terms proposed as antonyms. If it is not fiction, is it then fact, truth, or simply non-fiction? And if not fictional, fictive or fictitious, is it natural, serious, real or historical. The choice of the derived adjectives and antonyms reflects an implicit position on the nature of fiction. Some terms apply to discourse, others to objects, and still others are compatible with both situations. We may speak of fictitious or of real situations; of fictive or historical events; of fictional or real objects; of fictive or natural discourse; of fictional or true stories; of fictive or serious utterances. . . In everyday language, we call an object or a situation fictional when it does not exist objectively, when it is a creation of the imagination. . .As antonyms to “fictional”, the above definition suggests “real” or “factual”. When true of the real world, a statement yields facts; but what does it yield when false? (Ryan 1991: 13).

In this respect, false statements about the world yield fiction, which brings to mind Plato's criticism of myth as an erroneous representation of the world when conveyed through the

discourse of poetry in ancient Greek society. As such, the cultural reality postulated by living myth is reduced to an inconsequential construction of the mind. It no longer represents a sacred space that is ontologically self-sufficient, and all weight and stability have been removed since now it is deemed as intrinsically incomplete and inconsistent. Myth loses its privileged position, along with the philosophical notions of truth, existence and world-language relations so rigidly delineated and projected by the territory it describes. Living myth, no longer posits a foundational reality declaring "what the world is based on, what its oppositional forces are" and what hidden worlds comprises man (Paden 1994: 53). A whole world (cultural reality) brought into being through and based on living myth is made devoid of truth-value. As a result, living myth looses its significance because the life pattern it constitutes, acts out or embodies no longer invokes anything *real* in our world.

Though this section was chiefly framed in a religious context, the points raised are relevant to any myth stipulating an ideology, since sacrality may constitute anything of an elevated nature in culture. Loss of credibility inevitably results in disenchantment, whether that ideology is secular or religious. Contemporary society is comprised of both the religious and irreligious, and where desacralisation has occurred it has not brought about the loss of faith holistically. Myths are widespread and not just limited to religion. However dire and far-reaching the implications of a living mythological system turning into a fictional one do seem, it clearly shows the flexibility of myth. Every corpus of myth embodies a specific domain in cultural development. Spanning from past to present it necessarily entails a very large territory. It describes too "complex a structure, with too much exemplary value

attached to it, for the culture to simply reject it out of hand" (Pavel 1989: 41). Consequently, though some myths might be denied their sacrality these days, they remain in use, constantly being recycled and re-appropriated within other domains, texts or discourses. In Western culture the predominant mythology of Christianity has remained active in society despite the challenges of being placed alongside other religious, scientific, technological and intellectual developments. Though its influence has lessened in certain social spheres as society has advanced, in others it has been strengthened through the application of its principles to modern contexts. In America the ideological framework of Christianity has been applied to the war on Iraq as largely appropriated and conveyed through the political discourse of the previous American President, George W. Bush. After the terrorist attacks of September 9/11 on America by Islamic militants, Bush claimed that he "was told by God to invade Iraq and attack Osama bin Laden's stronghold as part of a divine mission to bring peace to the Middle-East, security for Israel, and a state for the Palestinians" (Cornwell 2005: 7). In his politics Bush allied himself to a Superior power and from the outset phrased the war on Iraq in quasi-religious terms, equating it with a struggle between good and evil. He invoked the rhetoric of good and evil in order to justify his 'crusade', a term he also used, against al-Qaeda and bin Laden (Kellner 2004: 148). Traditionally, Islam has mostly been considered by the West as the one great threat to Christian order (Carrol 2005: 7). In both Christian and Islamic mindsets, 'crusade' denotes a very loaded term with a long list of associations arising from the first origins of conflict between these two cultures in the distant past, and lasting to its more

modern manifestations.[23]

By phrasing the invasion of Iraq as a crusade against terrorism, Bush necessarily awoke the religious imagination of American society and aligned it, for the most part, with his political ends. Over the course of subsequent centuries, the earliest conflict between Islam and Christianity has been coloured by the cultural struggles that characterise the writing of history and its 'popular' construction. From a Christian perspective the crusading impulse presumes a demonizing of Islam and legitimises the denigration of its culture by projecting the image of Muslims as prone to violence because of their religion. If the war on Iraq is termed as a struggle between 'good and evil', it evokes the general view in Western culture that it is wrong to kill people if you are Saddam Hussein or al-Qaeda (evil) and right to kill people if you are an American soldier or George W. Bush (good). The actual deaths and crimes of killing in Iraq are irrelevant; it is the attitude of the killers that matters. The war on Iraq has also been described as a 'spiritual war' by some appropriating the ideology of Christianity to the discourse of war and politics this phrase seems to say that the American government is acting from humanitarian, rather than baser, motives. By construing Islam

[23] In relating the more modern manifestations of conflict regarding Christian and Islamic ideologies, such as the September 9/11 attack, I am not arguing that there exists a holistic struggle between Islam and Christianity in all their divergent manifestations. Christian ideology constitutes a religion where many hybrid strains of Christianity are available, all of which being not necessarily concerned with the state of Islam or Bush's 'War on Terror' as it relates to Islamic extremists for example. Rather it would be more prudent to say that a specific strain of Christianity such as 'fundamentalist Evangelism' is opposed to a specific strain of Islam, such as 'Islamofascism' for example (Schwartz 2006:http://www.weeklystandard.com/). Also, in the context of George Bush, Christian ideology is predominantly used in relation to his own Christian upbringing and how he incorporated the discourse of his faith into the dialectics of his politics.

as the enemy,[24] the ideological framework of Christianity provides American society, exemplified by Bush, with the moral and religious obligation to act, thereby legitimising the invasion of Iraq in representing it as a just war. Consequently, more and more people view the manifestation of American power, as Mark Twain wrote, “with its banner of the Prince of Peace in one hand and its loot-basket and butcher-knife in the other” (cited in Pilger 2004: 24).

In those spheres where grand narratives have been disbanded or destabilised, exemplified in the traditional mythology of Christianity, for example, new ones tend to be formulated in their place since human society is not static in nature. A loss of enchantment necessarily entails a desire for re-enchantment. Out of consumer culture and mass media has developed the dialectics of mass seduction, charisma and the cult of the personality. The likes of Marilyn Monroe, Madonna and Diana are elevated in modern society to embody the mythical symbols of 'star' and 'celebrity'. These figures constitute relatively new forms in the fundamental aesthetics of mythical language, as they have become iconic and generally saturate popular imagination through the incessant repetition and circulation of their forms in either book, tabloid, television or film. Born of the machinations of mass media and the cult of celebrity that has inspired them, these symbols represent some of the new forms society considers worthy of adulation.

[24] In this discussion the 'enemy' refers specifically to Islam, but it need not necessarily be so. The notion of 'enemy' is an open term that denotes a mythical character that can have any embodiment, ranging from Freemasons, homosexuals to any other social or cultural groups. It all depends on who is respectively construed as the 'enemy' within current ideological contexts. In contrast to 'enemy' myths, myths of 'reconciliation' are also formed, which aim to bridge difference by creating a sense of unity and harmony. An example would be the 'Rainbow nation' myth in South Africa that focussed on 'unity through diversity', that was placed in opposition to the previous regime's apartheid mythology which stressed notions of separate development in social and private spheres.

> The aesthetic of the cult proclaims that redemption is possible even in the dregs of ongoing despair. Rather than acknowledge that suffering is waste, emptiness, lack of meaning, the cult turns to the suffering of the star icon, makes [her/his] aura into something transcendent, identifies with that transcendence, and thus practices a view of the world in which reconciliation with suffering becomes imaginable through [her/him], in which the initiate's own suffering becomes mysteriously elevated (Herwitz 2008: 28).

These 'celebrities' or 'stars' have become iconic, inspiring a culture of devotion similar to that of traditional religious icons. As an icon, Madonna, for example, constitutes both individual and persona. Her life story has gained special qualities within contemporary culture and has become mythical since it represents a life-model that others may wish to follow. Presently, she embodies a 'living' myth in both the abstract and purely literal sense of the term. Madonna (fig. 1), like the Virgin Mother (fig. 2), inspires reflection, meditation and imitation through the adulation of her image. Much like Christian mythology has replaced the traditional religions of Greek and Roman society, it could be said that Madonna has come to replace some of the functions of her religious counterpart, by postulating her own, unique brand of 'spirituality' in contemporary culture. These two mythical beings differ greatly in the values they express, but the degree to which Madonna partly alludes to her traditional namesake shows to what extent both symbols could reactivate each other within popular imagination. Perhaps, it could be postulated that whilst some aspects of a god might be lost or discarded, others can be gained, and the modern

Madonna, as we know her, is but a newer incarnation of the older version. As a mythical symbol she would still denote the same psychic space as her counterpart in the imagination of man, but would embody a radically new set of values in her altered state. However, there is a marked difference between these two mythical protagonists in the character of spirituality they embody. Madonna, as the Holy Mother, acts to redeem society, whilst Madonna, the celebrity, lives only for herself. Though Madonna, Marilyn Monroe and Diana embody the mythical archetypes of 'star' and 'celebrity' in contemporary society, it would be prudent when confronted with these iconic images of mass culture to ask “the ancient question of the Holy Grail: Whom does it serve?” (Miles 2002: 66).

Similar to the mythical archetypes of 'star' and 'celebrity' in contemporary society, the 'superhero' has come to embody a new form in the history of the hero myth. Superheroes have replaced traditional figures like Hercules, Jason, Parsifal and Lancelot in the interpretation of what is considered the heroic ideal in contemporary society. Spiderman, Superman, The Green Lantern, Wolverine and Cyclops, for example, now stipulate the notions of bravery, for the most part, that popular imagination associates with. Heroes, as individuals with powers superior to common man, have lived through various incarnations over the course of time. Contemporary culture, with its post-industrial society characterised by elements of mass information, computerization and mechanization, has added its own, unique flavour to this formulation in the creation of the superhero, perhaps best expressed in Superman.

> In a post-industrial society, however, where man becomes a number in the realm of the organisation which has usurped his decision making role, he has no means of production and is thus deprived the power to decide. Individual strength, if not exerted in sports activities, is left abased when confronted with the strength of machines which determines man's very movements. In such a society the positive hero must embody to an unthinkable degree the power demands that the average citizen nurtures, but cannot satisfy (Eco 2004: 146).

Superman has godlike abilities: he is faster than the speed of light, if he exceeds it he actually breaks through the time barrier and enters other epochs; he has unlimited strength; he has super hearing; he can fly; and he has x-ray vision. Though this godlike being would seem to deny all notions of reader identification at first glance, identification is made possible through the figure of his meek and mild-mannered alter ego, Clark Kent. The ambiguity between the extraordinary nature of Superman and the mundaneness of Clark Kent relates the hope that within a mediocre existence every individual conceals some hidden aspect of great wonder and glory within themselves, that could redeem them from living average lives, if brought to the fore. There is, however, a fundamental difference between the superhero and its more traditional heroic counterparts, as found in either Nordic, Classical or Messianic mythology. A figure like Hercules, for example, is based on an established story through which his divine features are characterised (Eco 2004: 147). And as such, Hercules embodies an irreversible sense of destiny and immutable characteristics, since his identity is ingrained and attached to a very specific

narrative that has, over time, become entrenched in society. In contrast, a figure like Superman only becomes mythic when he is considered in his totality. He has no definitive narrative that backs his divine features; instead, his adventures seem to happen in an ever continuous 'present' as propagated in contemporary society through a wide variety of sustained representations. Ironically, Superman as a mythical archetype which denotes a universal law and therefore must be in part predictable, is decidedly unpredictable since it is not foreseeable what form the future instalments of his narrative and development as character would entail. However, as a 'totality' he has become emblematic, archetypal of certain collective aspirations in contemporary society and fixed enough in general nature to make him easily recognisable within present-day culture. Superman functions as a modern myth that denotes both entertainment and transcendence.

> The man of tomorrow would still go after gangsters and even show up petty bullies, but he was also meeting science fictional menaces worthy of his powers. Instead of an expression of what a ninety-seven pound weakling wished he could do, the comic book superhero was becoming a metaphor for release, transformation and revealed truth (Jones 2004: 173).

Like Christ before him, Superman is also not of this earth; he was brought to earth for the good of man. He shares a lot of the qualities that are usually associated with the Messianic religions. Iconic, like Jesus, he is perfect in motive and remains largely unquestioned in Western society, pedagogic, practically omnipotent, moral, modest, chaste, helpful, using

his powers only for good and opposing the forces of evil. His virtue protects him from the passing of time, transforming him into a platonic ideal. He too now embodies the role of 'Saviour' in contemporary culture, redeeming the world through battling the forces of visible evil.

It is a well-known fact that modern society is a consumer society, exemplified in Superman that is both myth and product. Much like Superman has usurped some of the traditional aspects associated with the Christlike saviour, so too has consumer society appropriated the notion of 'utopia' within its discourse. Utopias evoke the “idea of human solidarity and happiness”; if taken in a more literal sense this would either denote in Christian tradition the exalted state of humanity before the fall of man in the garden of Eden, or the universality of Heaven (Jacoby 1999: 181). In Western culture this was most importantly symbolic of the Christian concept of the 'brotherhood of mankind', a notion that represented a shared existence that treated society as a dynamic unity based on peace and solidarity. Though globalisation, techno-culture and telematics has brought about the realisation (or experience) of the world in its entirety, it has markedly disbanded the 'totalities' of societies. The universal conception of humanity as denoting a singular, all-encompassing society is not shared. The 'brotherhood of mankind' has been reduced to the brotherhood of the individual. Within Western culture the notion of delayed gratification, as implied by Heaven, has been replaced, to a large extent, by the instant gratification of consumer products.

> It is, then, an overall change in social stability that underlies the shift in 'rationality' from deferred to instant gratification. [For Durkheim]

> 'societies are infinitely more long-lived than the individuals', suggesting that the transience of an individual's life could draw succour from the permanence of society as a whole. Today, as Bauman suggests, the relative permanencies have changed places; the lifespan of the individual far outlasts society's once durable institutions. In the absence of a solid social framework, it is increasingly down to the individual to 'compose . . . continuity which society can no longer assure or even promise' (Clarke 2003: 150).

From this perspective the endless pursuit of satisfaction does to some degree provide permanence in human action and constitutes a sense of continuity in human existence. The notion of Utopia is now realised in the “opportunities of fulfilment spontaneously offered by the market” and propagated through advertisements “that promise to compensate for a dull and uninteresting life by portraying a life that can only be dreamed” (Clarke 2003: 157) This 'dream' is constantly being refreshed as new products are continuously made available for consumption by the market, and the advocacy of the idea that they would produce happiness and contentment once consumed. According to Mumford a utopia addresses the reservoir of potentialities to which a society is fully awake (cited in Jones 1999: 171); consequently, the market in modern society presents itself as a sphere of limitless opportunities through which those potentialities could hopefully be realised. In providing the illusion of a society in “constant progress towards the abolition of effort, the resolution of tension, greater ease of living and automation”, consumer culture

necessarily embodies a utopian ideal (Baudrillard cited in Jones 1999: 156) However, the individual drive towards satisfaction as based on consumer culture entails that utopia can only be realised if individual needs have been gratified, which conversely undermines any possibility of ever reaching utopia, whilst simultaneously striving towards it, since well-being is currently based not on the society as a whole, but rather on the indulgence of the self. Consequently, consumption has come to embody a predominant worldview in contemporary culture, it has become a myth, a way of life that is used by contemporary society as a statement about itself. According to Baudrillard "the only objective reality of consumption is the idea of consumption . . . which has acquired the force of common sense (Baudrillard cited in Clarke 2003: 160).

In his *Mythologies* (1957) Roland Barthes compares myth to a very specific *type* of speech:

> language needs special conditions in order for it to become myth. But what must be firmly established at the start is that myth is a system of communication, that it is a message. This allows one to perceive that myth cannot possibly be an object, a concept, or an idea; it is a mode of signification, a form. . . It can be seen that to purport to discriminate among mythical objects according to their substance would be entirely illusory: since myth is a type of speech, everything can be myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse. Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message: there are no formal limits to myth, there are no

> 'substantial' ones. Everything, then, can be a myth? Yes, I believe this, for the universe is infinitely fertile in suggestions. Every object in the world can pass from a closed, silent existence to an oral state, open to appropriation by society . . . (Barthes 1957: 109).

Myth suggests an open mode of signification that is actively embedded within the life of society. This entails that myth in many ways is unsystematic because no final system of interpretation can be used to explain it. Myth seems neither fixed nor final since it embodies static symbols with dynamic potentialities. What level of value or potential is attributed to mythical speech depends on what weight society gives them. The degree to which a myth purports values central to a culture, shows to what extent any given myth has the power to leave its permanent mark on a society and its later developments. Whole civilizations seem to be grounded in myth, enriching life, mind and conciousness. In this respect, myth, especially living myth, refers to a passionate response to the world. It constitutes an act of participation that creates a different way of experiencing everyday life. Myth not only supplies standards and precedents, but actually recreates and transfigures life in its image. No myth, however, is eternal since its nature is inherently unstable. As Barthes has shown, a myth's hold on society is never truly final since anything has the potential to be endowed with mythical speech (1957: 110).

3.4 CONCLUSION

The long process of modernization and intellectual 'Enlightenment' in the West has led to the neglect of the more traditional modes of mythical thought “in favour of the more

pragmatic, logical spirit of scientific rationalism" (Armstrong 2005: 121). In some respects many of the age-old, timeless narratives constituting foundational realities that once supported societies holistically have now deteriorated, degenerated and become somewhat detached from their original context of use. Their mythic symbolisms, however, tend to be retained and are appropriated by other discourses since they are now conveyed in different forms through the devices of contemporary culture. Mythic symbols are removed from the fixed functions they once stipulated and are now used across the board in all spheres of human activity for diffuse purposes. In the case where a mythology has entered the realm of story a domain shift occurs, as shown by the discussion on religion. This necessarily entails the migration of myth from stipulating a sacred ontology to stating a fictional one. Myths also migrate from text to text, culture to culture and discourse to discourse. The denigration of those myths once held dominant and explicit[25] to society (especially in the Western sphere), now do not remain unchallenged, and the ontologies they support often undergo a change in status as they shift and are appropriated into new conceptual domains.

Mythic thought, however neglected, remains a mainstay of human expression, aptly illustrated in the works of Nietzsche. Though he degraded Christian faith he also re-affirmed life. He posited redemption from *the death of god* through the figure of Zarathustra. Zarathustra preached the *will to power* – a new motivating force to replace religion, a new faith to save humanity from nihilism embodied in the conception of the

[25] Explicit myths generally refer to those mythologies that constitute religious worlds. As discussed previously religious worlds are comparable to living myth. These mythologies are more concrete and fully formed. They found the world in that the cultural reality they create is based upon what form of world-language relations, truth and existence they will stipulate. In this respect, Marxism also constitutes a mythology since these stipulations are equally relevant to the ideology it purports and can be applied to the formulations of his social theory. So too does Marx's conception of dialectical materialism represent a myth in its own right and has been appropriated and applied, often religiously, within many cultures.

'overman', constituting an ideology in its own right, and therefore a myth. Nietzsche's struggle with the dominant ideology of Christianity at that time shows that humanity are not merely passive inheritors of the grand narratives they create. These homogeneous, static metaphors often embody a point of struggle in society, which resulted in Nietzsche's case in the creation of a new grand narrative as expounded through his mouthpiece, Zarathustra. Myths take on various permutations in culture, often mutating into new forms, for example in popular culture the rise of the star, celebrity and superhero represent fundamentally new icons in the aesthetics of mythology. Since society is constantly in motion new myths and the ideologies they support tend to be placed alongside or appropriated by older ones. Sometimes, however, a new ideology may completely subvert its antecedent, and the worldview it stipulated is negated.

In a society that has become somewhat detached from its founding myths, myths implicit to that society ever gain more prominence. Implicit myth often constitutes striking symbolisms; constellations of meaning, not fully formed or structured, but irreducible in its implications. These myths often hold a particular appeal to society since they are adhered to beyond critical discourse, and therefore can be easily developed into their explicit counterparts. Waardenburg suggests that implicit myths tend to embody and propagate notions of “particular forms of irreducible dualism, different kinds of absolutised persecution and oppression, liberation and emancipation”, post-Apocalyptic and Utopianist ideals or beliefs regarding racial superiority and various kinds of unity or brotherhood (1980: 55). When these myths are developed explicitly they often constitute very destructive myths in society, which in the context of the twentieth century have resulted in

cases of massacre and genocide, as exemplified in the myths of racial superiority sustaining the Nazi regime in Germany or the application of apartheid under the Nationalists in South Africa. Myths of this nature tend to be destructive, because they have been narrowly racial, ethnic, denominational and egoistic. These notions can be equally applied to any mythology, secular or religious, if it is adhered to beyond critical discourse. Myth, then, does not constitute an open mode of signification, but rather seems to perpetuate a closed system.

Though it's true that the old forms of myth and mythical thought can not be regained as they once were, since the contemporary landscape has changed too much in relation to its past. Myth, remains a dominant cultural expression, in both its older and more modern manifestations, creating networks of relationships with the world through the act of continuously (re)interpretating it. These 'interpretations' constitute anchorages that ties man to society, nature and himself. What potentialities those anchorages will fill tends to fall more and more in the realm of the artist these days, since “there is a shift in the quality of aura from cult magic to aesthetic form as religion gives way to secularisation in the history of society” (Herwitz 2008: 60). According to Herwitz, art could potentially take over from religion in communicating and constituting the form of the sacred in modern society, as such, artists as manipulators of symbolic forms (like politicians) have the capacity to become elaborators, if not creators, of myth currently.

4. MYTH AND THE WORKS OF NEIL GAIMAN AND CONRAD BOTES

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Societies tend to reproduce themselves symbolically and materially. Today, processes of production entail computerization, information and automation, resulting in the mass-reproduction of society on a grand scale. Inevitably, this highly rationalized form of mass-production results in standardization, conformity and a plurality of copies characteristic of a society geared towards mass-consumption. Culture and cultural production is viewed as a commodity and becomes industrialized, giving rise to what the Critical Theorists termed 'culture industries' (Joseph 2006: 87). Advanced technologies such as satellite television, scientific and technological knowledge, computers and information alongside transnational conglomerates ensure that forms of culture are circulated globally. In effect, contemporary society constitutes a state of over-communication in which ideas, images, goods and other cultural forms, whether consumer, mass or media based can be freely exchanged internationally.

> Techno-culture represents a configuration of mass culture and the consumer society in which consumer goods [including comics], film, television, mass images and computerized information become a dominant form of culture throughout the developed world which increasingly interpenetrates developing countries as well. In this techno-culture, image, spectacle and aestheticized commodification, or 'commodity aesthetics', come to constitute new forms of culture

> which colonize everyday life and transform politics, economics and social relations (Kellner 1989:181).

In this regard contemporary society is defined by “a condition in which images, codes and models became primary determinants of everyday life” (Kellner 1989: 146). Constituting a generally multifaceted society that is not determined by a singular, monolithic ideology, but rather by a wide range of ideological frameworks as doled out by mass-culture. One of which constitutes myth. In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936), Walter Benjamin saw film, as the most powerful social agent of then contemporary mass movements. To quote Abel Gance as cited in this seminal work:

> Shakespeare, Rembrandt, Beethoven will make films. . . all legends, all mythologies and all myths, all founders of religion, and the very religions. . . await their exposed resurrection, and the heroes crowd each other at the gate (1936: II).

This statement is not just relevant to film, but in a time when culture is mass-communicated, myths and mythological imagery tend to be 'resurrected' in various mediums. This causes myth and its symbolisms to run rampant in contemporary society as they are communicated to all social spheres for diffuse purposes. When a mythic symbol is appropriated by a new domain or discourse other than its original context of use, some of its primary functions or aspects might be lost, whilst similarly new ones could be gained. Civilisation exhibits a state of constant motion, myths are continuously extended into new

boundaries as society develops. Though some myths have become detached from the original societies they once supported and no longer postulate the cultural realities they once founded, they have in a sense become liberated from stipulating previously set ontologies and now engender new ones as they are seized by other conceptual domains and new contexts of use. Myth, however, will always hold the power to allude to its fundamental ontology which is mass-communicated in a society defined by reproduction, especially since the reproduction always “reactivates the object reproduced” (Benjamin 1936: II). But reproduction also permits the viewer to meet the object, in this case myth, reproduced in “his own particular situation” (Benjamin 1936: II), which often results in a disconnection of myth from its fundamental ontology since an outsider's perspective on a mythology not his own is frequently viewed as fiction. The large scale disenchantment and detachment of myth regarding its set ontologies cause a domain shift. Whether sacred or cultural, when myth is viewed as fiction in a society geared towards mass-consumption and entertainment, a certain magnitude of circulation occurs which results in the widespread migration of mythologies and change regarding cosmologies.

Comics, as either a form of popular culture and entertainment or as product of mass-consumption carries within it the potential to manifest a society's dreams and nightmares. Ranging from articulations of hope to notions of repression, social conflicts, oppositional moments, subversive tendencies or utopian happiness, various ideologies, whether explicit or implicit, are freely found in its pages. Comics are one form of cultural production in contemporary culture responsible for the broad-scale re-interpretation and re-appropriation of myth through image, word and symbol. Continuous re-appropriation of

mythic elements by artists is one way by which myth could be kept alive and capable of transmitting an infinite number of communications to both public and private spheres in contemporary society. In a world defined by the free and instant exchange of information, myths migrate from culture to culture, discourse to discourse and text to text. They are imported to fit local landscape, custom, belief and the private sphere of the individual. Each act of retelling brings with it its own changes and connotations. This stipulates that the archaic forms of myth and mythical thought can not be regained as they once were, for society moves ever forward. Present day representations of myth might still be connected to the symbolic inheritance of each culture's past, and could constitute an important part of the conceptual framework and world of meaning that each society inhabits. As a writer in the comics industry Neil Gaiman once stated: “I learned that we have the right or obligation, to tell the old stories in our own ways, because they are our stories, and they must be told” (cited in Rauch 2003: 117). Though myth spans a wide variety of representational modes, it is the application of myth in contemporary comics focussing on the comic-works of the English writer Neil Gaiman and the South African artist, Conrad Botes that this chapter will chiefly look at.

The inclusion of myth in comics is nothing new. Since myth has always retained a close link to art and literature, the incorporation of mythic subject matter into comics seems a logical development. Some of the earliest western examples of mythic elements in mainstream comics were created by the publishing houses of DC and Marvel comics. The former creating *Wonder Woman* (1941) with its focus on Olympian mythology, and the latter *Thor* (1962), as based on the Norse equivalent. For the purposes of this thesis, Neil

Gaiman is chosen for his use of myth in mainstream comics. *The Sandman* narrative he created was published by DC Comics, one of the biggest publishing houses of comics internationally, and would give a good example of how myth, as an individual, artistic expression might be circulated on a more global scale. In contrast, Botes, as a South-African artist, is chosen for his local placing. Both Gaiman and Botes[26] have applied myth in their work and touching on every instance would not be within the scope of this thesis. I will primarily discuss the use of the Biblical myth of Cain and Abel[27] in both artist's works. I investigate how they have interpreted this myth, shared collectively within Western society, according to their own subjective frameworks, and I show how an understanding of this could be insightful regarding the transference and proliferation of mythic content today.

4.2 MYTH AND THE WORKS OF NEIL GAIMAN

Neil Gaiman is currently a well established writer whose literary works touch on a variety of subjects and span across genre and medium. His prolific repertoire includes the creation of *The Sandman* (fig. 3), a monthly title published by industry giant DC Comics. The series lasted for approximately eight years, consisted of seventy-six issues[28] and drew heavily on

[26] In order to place my own work contextually in the broader realm of comics, Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* constituted a good example of the commercial aspects a comic might entertain when it is mass produced and mass circulated within the global market. Botes, however, was chosen for our shared *Afrikaner* cultural heritage and was also important to draw a relation between my own work, as a South-African comics artist, and other locally placed artists within the genre.

[27] Cain and Abel represents a firmly entrenched metaphor within Western society. Depicting the archetypal first murderer and first victim, this myth has come stipulate a state of moral complexity through which Western society has come to question its own moral integrity. Therefore, a comparison between Gaiman and Botes's divergent interpretations of this long-standing mythic tradition of Cain and Abel seems viable in relating a continuation of its semantics in a more contemporary context.

[28] The Sandman was first released in 1988 and drew to a close with the publication of issue #75 in 1996. Though the series officially came to an end, Gaiman further extended and explored the mythic contexts of *The Sandman* in preceding and later publications, such as; *The Dream Hunters* (1999), *Death: The High Cost of Living* (1993), *Death: The Time of Your Life* (1996) and lastly, *Endless Nights* released in 2003 (Wagner, Golden & Bissette 2008: 130-146). As such, the fictional domain that *The Sandman* encompasses is vast and numinous, constituting an artistic creation of more than a million words of script.

the inspiration of myth for its content. Initial publication of the series took the form of twenty-four page monthly comics, which were later collected into book form spanning the following ten volumes; (1) *Preludes and Nocturnes*, (2) *The Doll's House*, (3) *Dream Country*, (4) *Season of Mists*, (5) *A Game of You*, (6) *Fables and Reflections*, (7) *Brief Lives*, (8) *Worlds' End*, (9) *The Kindly Ones* and (10) *The Wake.* Each volume consists of an overarching narrative specific to the series and combined forms a two-thousand page saga that centres on the Sandman, a being who is the personification of myth and dreams.[29] He is a member of The Endless, seven beings who have overseen the universe since the beginning of time.

> What you need to know before you start: There are seven beings that aren't gods. Who existed before humanity dreamed of gods and will exist after the last god is dead. They are called The Endless. They are embodiments of (in order of age) Destiny, Death, Dream, Destruction, Desire, Despair and Delirium (Gaiman 1994: x).

The Endless represent an embodiment greater than the gods. They are manifestations of consciousness and their names constitute their functions. In the context of *The Sandman* narrative The Endless frame and serve as backdrop for all myth, since it could be taken

[29] The relation between myth and dream is an age old association. But with Carl Jung's theory of the 'collective unconscious' and the notion that both dreams and myths not only share material patterns, but also originate form the human psyche, ushered in a new era regarding the relationship between myths and dreams. This theory was further extended by later scholars, such as Joseph Campbell, who saw “dream [as] the personalized myth [and] myth [as] the depersonalised dream...[However], we must note that myths are not exactly comparable to dream. Their figures originate from the same sources – the unconscious wells of fantasy. . . but [myths] are not the spontaneous products of sleep. On the contrary, their patterns are consciously controlled” (1956: 19 – 256). So, myths are consciously formed and shaped, whilst dreams are the raw spontaneous creations of the unconscious mind. Gaiman was intrigued by the idea of creating a fictional character that lived in dreams, oversaw the realm of sleep and functioned as the embodiment of the spontaneous productions of the unconscious mind – which inspired the development of *The Sandman* narrative.

that all human mythology is derived from them. Gaiman uses classical archetypes, whilst not exactly copying them. The Sandman (also known as Morpheus, Dream, Lord of Sleep and King of the Nightmare Realms) is the proverbial prince of stories. His only function is to maintain The Dreaming, the realm in which humanity spends nearly a third of their lives. The Dreaming is also the literal repository not only of every story ever told, but more significantly, of every story that could *ever* be dreamed. The structure of *The Sandman* basically encompasses an extensive fictional domain, the nature of its scope repeatedly touching on the import and place of myths, gods and dreams to society. Historical characters, classical literature, mythical deities, magical creatures and the real world freely mingle within its pages, throwing the popular notions of fiction as an unreal representation of reality and non-fiction representing reality itself into disarray.

> [Lets define] two kinds of fantastic fiction? One, the kind most often seen in horror novels and movies, offers up a reality that resembles our own, then postulates a second invading reality, which has to be accommodated or exiled by the status quo it is attempting to overtake. Sometimes, as in any exorcism movie – and most horror movies are that, by other names – the alien thorn is removed from the suppurating flank of the real. On other occasions the visitor becomes part of the fabric of “everyday” life. Superman is, after all, an alien lifeform. He's simply the acceptable face of invading realities. The second kind of fantastique is far more delirious. In these narratives, the whole world is haunted and mysterious. There is no solid status quo, only a series of relative realities, personal to each of the

> characters, any or all of which are frail, and subject to eruptions from other states and conditions (Barker 1990: x).

A point well illustrated in *The Sandman*, since the narrative barely shows any discretion regarding conventional boundaries in that “the glorious, the goofy and the godlike [are liberally placed] shoulder to shoulder” (Barker 1990: x). Gaiman employs recursive fantasy to expand on and deepen contemporary society's conception of classical mythology and popular history. The extent to which *The Sandman* tailors classical myth for a modern audience can be seen in the protagonist Dream (Morpheus) himself. The Sandman as the mythical figure of Morpheus dates back to the ancient Roman connotation of “the spirit of shapes and forms seen in our sleep-dreams” (Levitan 2006: 97). The overall structure of *The Sandman* is not told in a linear way, but throughout it traces the path leading to the inevitable and eventual destruction of the Dreamlord. Gaiman sums up the main gist of the narrative as follows: “The King of dreams learns he must change or die and then makes his decision” (cited in Wagner, Golden & Bissette 2008: 27). With the death of Dream, Gaiman questions the notion of changing cosmologies. For how can the Sandman change? As the fundamental embodiment of dream and story, – by nature universal and eternal, how can he die?

> Dream dies. But how can an anthropomorphic projection of consciousness die, really? Well, it can't, although in another way it can. In the last episode, Dream of the seven Endless, Morpheus, the shaper of form, the principle of storytelling, does indeed die. . . only to be replaced by another

> aspect of himself, a new Dream who is himself and yet is not, is subtly and crucially different. . . (McConnel 1996: x).

The point of changing cosmologies or the migration of myth as illustrated by the death of Dream, is perhaps best caught in chapter two on page four of *The Sandman: The Wake,* in which a noteworthy conversation takes place between the following inhabitants of the Dreamlord's realm:

> Lucien (who was revealed in *The Kindly Ones* to be the first raven, which can metaphorically be read as the first man), Cain and Abel (who represent the first children), and Eblis O'Shaughnessy (the youngest character there, having just been created from mud). Eblis is confused after meeting [the new aspect of Dream] Daniel: “The young lord in white – who is he?” “He is Dream of the Endless,” replies Lucien. “So . . . who died?” asks Eblis. “Nobody died,” says Cain. “How can you kill an idea? How can you kill the personification of an action?” “Then what died? Who are you mourning?” pursues Eblis. And Abel answers, “A puh-point of view” (cited in Bender 1999: 205).

With those words Abel posits an inextricable link between stories and the ideologies through which the world is approached. Fictions told inevitably enact prominent ideologies, and ideologies inherently influence fiction. *The Sandman* centres on the prominent theme of the changing status regarding mythical cosmologies. It is a tale fuelled by concepts of

transformation, conversion and reinvention, as all that was once accepted as truth, or even as ultimate truth, now passes into the realm of story. As explicit myth looses its hold on certain societies, it stops positing definitive living cultural realities, but instead posits fictional ones. And though it no longer marks a way of life based on the grounding blocks of what was once considered ultimate truth, it should be noted that within the framework of its own reference fiction postulates its own truth. Consequently, in contemporary culture it becomes more and more difficult to draw the line between ordinary stories and what is deemed myth.

4.2.1 CAIN AND ABEL

The layering of the mythic with the 'everyday' sets the overall tone of *The Sandman.*[30] It highlights the point that myths, as general metaphors concretized within the fabric of societies and sedimented through continuous use, are slow to change. Lingering mythologies explored in *The Sandman* range from the Jewish and Christian figures of Lucifer, Cain, Abel and Eve, the Norse, Odin, Thor and Loki, the Japanese Susano-no-moto, the Greek muse Calliope and her son Orpheus, the Indian goddess Kali and the Babylonian Ishtar, as well as various representatives of Faerie and world folklore. Dream's sister Death comments on this occurrence in *The Sandman*'s third volume *Dream Country*:

[30] For Stephen Rauch, *The Sandman* postulates a modern myth, firstly; because the mythic content it includes is not limited to a particular mythology, but draws from world mythology and thus, validates all myths and moves beyond the boundaries of individual cultures. Secondly, and most importantly, is that *The Sandman* conforms to Joseph Campbell's for functions of myth – the mystical, cosmological, sociological and psychological, as have been touched on in chapter one. (1) *The Sandman* relates the mystical because the narrative is filled with awe and wonder at the nature of man and the world, (2) it relates to the cosmological through the introduction of The Endless who form a cosmology of their own, (3) it conforms to the sociological in that *The Sandman* narrative questions established social order and critiques it, (4) and lastly, with the death of Dream, *The Sandman* fulfils its psychological function by showing readers how to live a human lifetime full of meaning in the face of death (Rauch 2003: 18-19).

“mythologies take longer to die than people believe. They linger on in a kind of dream country” (Gaiman 1990: 109). For Gaiman, this 'dream country' literally refers to The Dreaming, the area of psychic real-estate over which Dream exerts his power.

> Morpheus, Dream – call Him what you will – is not the only entity living – *living* is, of course a misprecion – in the Dream Place. There are others. Many others. The lost and the bodiless, archetypes and ghosts and . . . others. They are his servants, His creatures, while they live in His realm; and He is their lord (Gaiman 1990: x).

The Dreaming is inhabited by a wide variety of characters taken from myth, most prominently the Biblical archetypes of Cain, Abel and Eve. Since *The Sandman*'s use of myth is so vast, for the sake of practicality the main point of discussion focuses on Gaiman's employment of the Cain and Abel metaphor, in order to draw a point of relevance with Conrad Botes's application of the same metaphoric device. Firstly, what should be noted is that *The Sandman* is a comic tailored for a mass-audience, as opposed to Conrad Botes's work. Published internationally by DC Comics it sold over a million copies by 1999 (Bender 1999: xiv). Monthly titles, such as *The Sandman* tend to be collaborative enterprises consisting of writers, pencillers, letterers and inkers all contributing to a single project. As the writer of the series, Gaiman had to conform to the parameters of the DC universe's fictional domain. For the sake of continuity this consisted of retrofitting and reinterpreting some existing DC characters. A clear exemplification is the character of the Sandman himself.

> Now, the original Sandman, in the late thirties and forties, was a kind of Batman Lite. Millionaire Wesley Dodds, at night would put on his gas mask, fedora, and cape, hunt down bad guys and zap them with his gas gun, leaving them to sleep until the cops picked them up the next morning – hardly the stuff of legend. So what Gaiman did was jettison virtually everything except the title. The Sandman – childhood's fairy who comes to put you to sleep, the bringer of dreams, the Lord of Dreams, the Prince of Stories – indisputably the stuff of legend (McConnel 1996: x).

Similarly, Cain and Abel were the respective hosts of two popular DC horror titles in the 1970s, *The House of Mystery* and *The House of Secrets* (Bender 1999: 244). Gaiman simply used these characters as he found them, and through this act of resurrection he made them his own. During the run of the series Cain and Abel became critical elements in *The Sandman*'s overall narrative arch. Originally, the Biblical brothers constituted flat, stock characters in the DC universe. Gaiman took them and developed them into more well-rounded individuals. As a result, the traditional mythic structure of the light/dark allegory delineated by Cain and Abel, which usually constitutes quite a stark representation, is here presented in various shades of grey. The Cain and Abel metaphor is a long-standing and well-established trope[31] within western custom. Derived from a biblical past, Cain and Abel

[31] Repeated use and exposure of such culturally available tropes by members of a society subtly preserves and upholds the shared assumptions implicit in the group. A metaphor like Cain and Abel, as a popular form of figurative speech is much like an anchor linking members of society to its dominant ways of thinking. Once a metaphor is employed it extends beyond its original context of use and becomes part of much larger system of associations. Therefore, dominant metaphors in society can both reflect and influence values particular to a culture (Chandler 2007: 125-129).

are considered historical fact in Judeo-Christian tradition and have come to symbolise both the notion of the sacrificial lamb[32] and the evil inherent in man.

> . . . it came to pass that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground and offering to Jehovah. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock, and of their fat. And Jehovah looked upon Abel, and on his offering; and upon Cain, and on his offering he did not look. And Cain was very angry and his countenance fell. . . And Cain spoke to Abel his brother, and it came to pass when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. And Jehovah said to Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: am I my brother's keeper? . . . And [Jehovah] said. . . when thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield thee its strength; a wanderer and fugitive shalt thou be on this earth. . . whoever slayeth Cain shall be revenged sevenfold. And Jehovah set a mark on Cain, lest any finding him should smite him. And Cain went out from the presence of Jehovah, and dwelt in the land of Nod, toward the east of Eden (The Holy Scriptures. *Gen*. 4: 1-17).

[32] Although Cain and Abel refers to a fratricide, in Christian tradition it is often symbolically construed as the first parricide. In that Abel, being the first martyr and representing the sacrificial lamb, is constitutive of Jesus Christ. Cain, therefore, symbolically murdered God the Father through killing an aspect of the Holy Trinity. It is interesting to note that Freud identified the origin of religion and culture in the primordial act of the first parricide. The beginnings of religion was to him rooted in a historical event, namely the first murder of the Father at the hands of his elder sons (cited in Eliade 1969: 49-50).

Scripturally, this was the way in which death entered the world. Religious symbols such as these, or any symbol with a religious quality, could become points of crystallisation within society. As points of reference for people these symbols can survive for very long periods of time, not changing as other things usually do with the ticking of the clock. Moreover, the meaning of a religious symbol such as Cain and Abel can be reinterpreted again and again, altering its ontology through the course of time, with or without the permanency of religion[33] (Waardenburg 1980: 41-47). Whether taken as historical fact or only in its symbolic context, the story of Cain and Abel constitutes one of many popular metaphors through which Western society engages the world and tries to understand its relationship to it. The *idea* that Cain and Abel supports is open to continuous re-appropriation and re-interpretation within contemporary Western culture. In the context of *The Sandman* this is of notable interest, since the narrative is not so much about people and the world, but instead places a particular focus on people and the ideas and ideologies they formulate to mediate their interaction with the world. Through the literal depiction of Cain and Abel in the comics medium (fig. 4), Gaiman makes these metaphors concrete.

By giving them fully rounded personalities, and letting them interact with scenarios outside of their traditional biblical context, readers are able to relate to these abstract conceptions as if they are real. The degree of transformation these characters underwent in relation to their biblical counterparts is quite extensive. Abel is portrayed as a fat, hairy little man, timid and with a stutter – due to the continuous abuse he suffers at the hands of his

[33] Though a religion might be lost, its symbolism constitutes an emotional investment by members of society shaped over long periods of time, and as such will never be completely negated. Whether partial or complete the psychological rapport propagated by these symbols will remain in use.

brother Cain. Cain, in contrast, is tall, dominant, overbearing and biting in his interaction with Abel. In Figure 4 Cain asks Abel “What kind of brother would I be if I did that?” and Abel answers; “My kind of b-brother. The, uh, the kind who kills me whenever he's uh. . . mad at me, or bored, or just in a lousy m-mood”. And Cain dismisses this statement by saying “Hehh. Let's let fraternal bygones be bygones, eh pudgy?” But fraternal bygones can not be foregone, narrative determines behaviour and Cain and Abel are caught in the repetitive loop of the one's demise and the other's anger and guilt (fig. 5). As long as the metaphor is held in the mind of society and for it to remain meaningful, Cain and Abel are doomed to repeat the same pattern throughout eternity, and this is their curse. Gaiman employs this metaphor so deftly throughout the series, that it is never simply a question of hating the evil Cain, but rather readers are left in a more complicated and reflective situation of pitying both Cain and Abel. The biblical brothers as mythical archetypes are limited in their expression, fated to repeat a singular action, but by reinterpreting their archaic mythical trappings through the contemporary context of *The Sandman* Gaiman creates another frame of reference from which the reader can experience these well-entrenched metaphors outside of their usual form of use. In *The Sandman* Cain and Abel have the additional function of safeguarding stories, specifically mysteries and secrets, and though interpreted anew, these conceptions both imply and interact with a heritage of existing ideas that have constellated over time around this analogy. Gaiman cleverly weaves these mythical trappings into the greater context of *The Sandman*, making them function to suit the need of his narrative. In *The Sandman: Season of Mists* (fig.6), the character of Lucifer confronts Cain, who served as Dream's messenger to Hell. Lucifer quotes the *Bible*: “and Cain went out from the presence of the Lord and dwelt in the land of

Nod, on the east of Eden" (*Gen*. 4 :16). And he goes on to ask "Where you still live, eh?". For Gaiman this made perfect sense, because the land of Nod translated from the Hebrew "Niad" meant "unstable and changing, an uncertain seat" (Williams 1982: 26), which to him connected directly to the Dreaming.[34]

In this respect, as the home of mythical archetypes and also that deep well of fantasy dreamers visit every night when they go to sleep, the Dreaming relates to Jung's notion of the collective unconscious.[35] In the context of *The Sandman* then, the inner realities of people are just as important as the objective world. Even more so, since in Gaiman's universe dreams are pre-eminently real and superior to reality in that they have the potential to shape and change society's conception of reality. Through the literal depiction of Cain and Abel abstract notions regarding this metaphor are made tangible, and true to their mythical archetypal form the cycle of murder continues, but Abel never truly dies, for their dream is still held captive by a world that dreams the ritual act of murder anew each day. The portrayal of these two figures shows how myth can both express the tenebrous and luminous qualities of the human condition. Though Cain and Abel's interaction is often

[34] From a Biblical point of view, the land of Nod as Cain's place of exile was taken to be a desert place, dark, precarious, solitary – a waste. These considerations where informed by the notion that Cain as the first murderer represents the antithesis of light (Williams 1982: 26), since the Dreaming includes all aspects of human imagination it is also constitutive of this shadowy state.

[35] Jung's formulation of the collective unconscious relates to patterns that are cross-culturally synonymous no matter what society. Originating from the psyche, which contains "all the images that have ever given rise to myths", the collective unconscious is "not individual, but universal" and "more or less the same in all individuals" (Jung cited in Rauch 2003: 27) One of the proofs he used for this universal parallelism was the conception of archetypes - "Archetypes are, by definition, factors and motifs that arrange the psychic elements into certain images, characterised as archetypal, but in such a way that *they can be recognized only from the effects they produce*. They exist preconciously, and presumably they form the structural dominants of the psyche in general. . . As *a priori* conditioning factors they represent a special psychological instance of the biological 'pattern of behaviour', which gives things their specific qualities" (Jacobi 1959: 31). In this respect, archetypes are not accessible on a conscious level, they can only be expressed and experienced indirectly, but due to their strong emotional connotation they always produce an extra dimension of meaning when expressed.

comical in *The Sandman* (Abel's childlike innocence aggravates the malevolent Cain to no end), the seriousness of their situation cannot be denied when faced with the brutality of Abel's murder at the hands of his brother each time. Fratricide remains their main point of definition in relation to each other. However, in *The Sandman* Abel, as the Keeper of Secrets in the Dreaming is empowered over his brother, Cain as the Keeper of Mysteries, to some degree. For ever mystery can be negated by the telling of a secret (fig. 7 & 8), but that empowerment tends to be short lived, usually ending in Abel's death. And yet, that final conclusion is something they cannot escape from and have learned to live with instead. This thorough humanization of the Cain and Abel myth is aptly illustrated in the final frame of page 23 in *The Sandman* # 40 *The Parliament of Rooks* (fig. 8). After violently murdering Abel and throwing him in the fiery hearth of his own home,[36] Cain mutters “I'll . . . I'll see you tomorrow, then. It's your turn to make dinner. . . Take care of yourself”. For as much as they present the mythical motif of the archetypal first murderer and the first victim, they too will remain forever brothers.

4.3 MYTH AND THE WORKS OF CONRAD BOTES

In contrast to Neil Gaiman, Conrad Botes constitutes a local figure in the South African landscape. Straddling the world between comics and fine art, his works have been presented in both local and international collections. He first made a name for himself with the publication of *Bitterkomix* in association with Anton Kannemeyer in 1992. Both are South African, *Afrikaans*-speaking artists whose work in *Bitterkomix,* derived from the grim past of Apartheid, is very much the product of a local, South African society with regards to

[36] In the Dreaming Cain and Abel are neighbours, the former living a the House of Mystery and the latter in the House of Secrets.

content and intention. *Bitterkomix* represents a controversial series of underground comics characterised by its hard-edged aggression, outrage and assault on the Afrikaner cultural mainstream. The main focus of *Bitterkomix* centers on the dynamics of power and authority and how it was employed to propagate dominant *Afrikaner* ideologies, resulting in the creation of myths that could only be deemed overtly political. *Bitterkomix* is aesthetically and socially of particular interest and will form the prominent point of discussion, though both Botes and Kannemeyer have extended their artistic reach far beyond the original impetus of its pages. In *Bitterkomix* Kannemeyer's work tends to be mostly autobiographical, taking the form of a confessional describing the various humiliations and indoctrinations he suffered at the hands of the so-called authority figures during his childhood. Analytical and declamatory, his work contains a strong sense of concrete social relevance and irony. Currently, his polemic has “since radiated out into a broader psycho-sexual, socio-historical critique of Afrikaner culture and South African society in general” (Mason 2006: 7).

In contrast to Kannemeyer's hard-edged autobiographical and visual severity, Conrad Botes's work is imbued with a greater degree of what Mason calls 'atmospheric romanticism' (2006: 7). Stygian in nature, his stories and accompanying illustrations in *Bitterkomix* can be described as darkly romantic in the truly dystopian sense of the term. As a counterpoint to Kannemeyer, Botes's interest lies more in the dynamics of graphic storytelling. Much of his stories concern the re-telling of *Afrikaner* myths and histories. His incendiary style and darkly, perverted atmospheres frames many an *Afrikaner* protagonist in various states of fervour or dementia. It is perhaps necessary to first look at one of Botes's historical recreations, namely the battle of Blood River, in order to understand

where he comes from as an artist, and also to draw a contextual framework for the later analysis of my own work as another South African, Afrikaans-speaking artist. By tradition the *Afrikaner* is conservative and adheres strongly to group values. But for all their conservatism they also exhibit a strong streak of individualism. This trait has been historically presented in the *Afrikaner*'s “long-cherished perception of himself as a free individual asserting his right to exist” (Kerr 2006: 133). This was clearly expressed in their drive towards self-determination in 1834 as the *Voortrekkers* set off into the hinterland of Africa away from British rule, an act which brought with it an ill-fated isolationism and a strong sense of superiority towards the indigenous population. The old *Afrikaner* identity is considered racist, rigid and patriarchal. Even in a post-apartheid era the pervading myth of '*volk en vaderland'* is still felt.

> When the apartheid state collapsed in 1994, the impetus for resistance art disappeared and most artists went on with their normal business of making art that addressed less parochial issues, such as gender and identity. But for the Afrikaner artist, even though the macrostructure of a political oppressor had disappeared there remained the continuing pressure of the microstructure of Afrikaner society. The norms and values that had been written large in fascist legislation of the Nationalists continued in the family and smaller society. It is against these norms and values and, more importantly, the power structures and accompanying hypocrisy and abuse they

encourage, that contemporary outrage artists[37] are fighting (Kerr 2006: 135).

As a South African *Afrikaans*-speaking artist Conrad Botes still had to deal with various defunct *Afrikaner* cultural ideologies post-1994. Conservative attitudes retained in the older generation still held sway in the community. Notions regarding conformity, sexual repression, miscegenation, religious obedience and obedience to authority maintained implicit and explicit ideologies that in the hands of the previous regime constituted myths of domination and power. Under this rubric falls the battle of Blood River. As with the various political myths[38] created around the Great Trek, so too does Blood River stipulate a myth employed, maintained, sustained and guided according to the self-interest of the *Afrikaner* social group. In *Bitterkomix* 5 (1995) Conrad Botes questions the validity of this myth in his rendition of "*Bloedrivier*" (fig. 9). "*Bloedrivier*" portrays the murder of Piet Retief and his delegation at the hands of the Zulu king, Dingane in 1838. Retaliatory attempts by the *Voortrekkers* failed, however the Zulu triumph remained short-lived. Under the leadership of Andries Pretorius the Zulu army suffered a decisive defeat at the hands of the *Voortrekkers* in what was later to become known as the battle of Blood River. 16 December 1838 was forever onwards commemorated as the day on which the *Voortrekkers* formed a covenant with God, for in return for victory over the Zulus they promised to honour this date every year as a holy day. Consequently, the battle of Blood River became legendary and was transformed into a political myth that not only legitimized

[37] Kerr views Kannemeyer and Botes as 'outrage artists' because their iconography in *Bitterkomix* marked by depictions of rape, incest, misogyny, racial stereotypes, corporeal punishment etc. These unremitting references to the abuse of power, is to Kerr "both the cause of outrage in others and the result of outrage in the artists" (2006: 135 -136).

[38] Leonard Thompson in *The Political Mythology of Apartheid* (1985), defines a political myth as "a tale told about the the past to legitimize or discredit a regime" (cited in Petzold 2007: 128).

white minority rule, but also provided divine justification for the presence of the *Afrikaner* in South Africa. Most important, however, was that the battle of Blood River along with the Great Trek were the foundation stones for Afrikaner identity and nation construction.

> In this reading of the Trek group solidarity is stressed, since the emigrants are said to have entered collectively into a 'covenant' with God, through which ownership of the land was and is legitimized. Identity, in this account, is God-given and therefore unchanging, and all members of the community are described as having equal access to this group identity, and through it to the land (Coetzee cited in Petzold 2007 : 117).

In *Bitterkomix* Botes exposes Blood River as a national myth, a fantasy derived from the deathbed of the *Voortrekker* Sarel Cilliers. Botes thoroughly denaturalizes the myth of Blood River, effectively alienating and dislocating the reader from the conventional responses it would usually illicit, making “clear that what we have been reading is not history so much as the history of a self-interested construction of a myth” (Barnard 2006: 144). In this respect the God-given justification it once stipulated is negated by Botes's subversive portrayal of Blood River's mythic narrative, constituting an act of iconoclasm on his part since those heroic and larger-than-life *Afrikaner* icons are shown not to be so heroic after all. Botes shows the foundations of the *Afrikaner* identity and nation to be based on fabrication and artifice. His portrayal of Blood River is in direct conflict with the notions of national emergence and the *Afrikaner* as a chosen people. And by tracing the myth of Blood River from inception to application, Botes has also come to question the morality of *Afrikaner* heroes, an act which was once considered unconscionable. The final

pages of his comic depicts the hero of Blood River, Andries Pretorius, in Hell, suffering in a pool of boiling blood amongst all those others who have also used violence as a means to their own ends. With the destruction of its heroes,[39] Botes denies the heroic and romantic versions of *Voortrekker* history and threatens to break the foundation myths of *Afrikaans* culture.

Similarly, in a strip titled *Cain and Abel* (*Bitterkomix* 5 1995), Botes's historical rendition of the legendary *Boer* General Christiaan de Wet also places this heroic figure under fire. In the strip, Christiaan de Wet's relationship with his brother is likened to that of Cain and Abel. Characterised by primary conflict, both brothers held opposite views regarding surrender in the Anglo-Boer war (1899-1902). Their difference, however, was not resolved in its usual mythical conclusion. Instead, Botes strips down the legend of Christiaan de Wet to a mere man who actively contemplates the murder of his own brother, but a man who is also haunted by bitterness and regret. As such, Conrad Botes's portrayal of Blood River and Christiaan de Wet constitutes an act of demystification, ironically through the employment of certain mythical elements. Heroes like Andries Pretorius and Christiaan de Wet are subject to changing discourse. And even though a myth like Blood River is shown by Botes to be fabricated, it does not necessarily entail the assumption that it no longer matters or that its truth value is wholly negated. Old ideologies and symbols persist, even while some undergo radical alteration as the material basis for certain beliefs in society changes, some mutate through reinterpretation, whilst others remain deeply entrenched

[39] Shared heroes like Andries Pretorius and the *boer* general Christiaan de Wet promote social unity regarding ethnicity, history and identity within *Afrikaner* society. Aided and abetted by *Afrikaner* culture-brokers, hagiography promoted in popular works of *Afrikaner* history, by the likes of such noteworthy figures as G. Preller, E. Marais and J.D. Kestell “created a climate of ancestor worship. . .that functioned as foundation myths that defined and legitimized the polity” (Swart 2004: 854).

within the fabric of culture opposed to transformation. A symbol like Blood River, in all its incarnations and various receptions, remains an iconic event crystallised within the psyche of the *Afrikaner*. Botes's representation of Blood River gives readers an alternative voice in mainstream *Afrikaner* culture and puts them in touch with the politics of unofficial discourse in South Africa (Swart 2004: 866). Though Botes portrays *Afrikaner* heroes in various states of undress, the likes of Christiaan de Wet and Andries Pretorius are still retained as a means through which most *Afrikaners*, even in contemporary times, still imagine themselves.

4.3.1 CAIN AND ABEL

In Contrast to Botes's vernacular of *Afrikaner history* and its accompanying myths, his latest works tend to be much less insular and more universal. There is a marked difference between his rendition of *Cain and Abel* in *Bitterkomix 5* (1995) and *Bitterkomix 15* (2008). The last publication of *Bitterkomix* is a clear indication of Botes's break from concrete, historical concerns towards a more obscure and metaphysical iconography. Since his works no longer carry overtly political references his latest portrayals of *Cain and Abel* now constitute transhistorical, transcultural narratives. Botes explored the subject of *Cain and Abel* through various mediums, ranging from singular paintings to lithographs and drawings. Most of his aesthetics is based on pop-art rooted in comic book drawing and usually consists of cartoon stereotypes placed along more figurative ways of representation. However, these will not be looked at since the discussion centers on the Cain and Abel metaphor in its extended form as found in *Bitterkomix* 15 (fig. 10). As a master of comic *noir*, Botes carries the narrative of *Cain and Abel* in a loose, dark and

robust style. His work comes across as intense and immediate, his imagery as disturbing and mesmerising. The use of silent narration extends these qualities to all pages of his comic. Where speech balloons have been employed, clarification is left to symbols or icons.

> Forced to find non-linguistic solutions to their narrative problems, . . . artists have relied on symbolic objects, icons and visual metaphors to get their stories across. The result is an extraordinary metalinguistic document that transports you into a weirdly silent realm of partially revealed meanings where images take on mythical, hallucinatory dimensions, narrative sequences are frequently non-linear, the familiar becomes unfamiliar and the bizarre is commonplace. . . Meanings rise up from the subconscious, reflexes and emotions, from the groin, transmitted viscerally without the interfering mediation of words (Mason 2006: 4).

As a result, Botes's rendition of *Cain and Abel* denies easy interpretation. By not employing words, he extends and opens the metaphor of the biblical brothers beyond its normal conceptual familiarity. And no matter how direct and confrontational his crisply illustrative style may be, the narrative is filled with puzzling instances and differing levels of enigma. Set in a bleak and brutish dystopian landscape, amidst an authoritarian religion, the protagonist Cain constitutes an anti-hero. Lacking in all the trappings of idealized heroism, Cain as a symbol for social disharmony is deeply flawed. But this constitutes an irony, since his flaws seem minor in relation to the inherent violence of the society that

surrounds him. Hypocrisy and corruption go hand in hand with the tyrannical application of faith, and the prevalent Christian iconography that runs through the narrative is neither redemptive nor sacred.

> Botes' symbols are cut off from their symbolic reference and the vision of the world which guaranteed their meaningfulness in the first place. They are crippled and radically dysfunctional – manifesting more their own redundancy than anything else – no longer capable of transcendence, or even of saving themselves. . . At one level it plays on satire. But there is also something of a philosophical egg-dance. Cut off from their cosmological reference, the symbols of the sacred become tokens of that very meaninglessness they were invented to transcend, with the quasi-archetypal charge that they carry over from the context of religion serving only to invoke, viscerally interior conditions of squalor, hopelessness and essentially onanistic unrequitement. All that is left is the self – existence – but existence is all but impossible in the forest of damaged symbols (Powell 2007: 3).

Botes's rendition still, however, plays out in a highly suggestive symbolic realm even if it is rooted in solipsism, disillusion and angst. In *Cain and Abel* God does not constitute an orientation towards truth, but rather towards oppression. Religion is not experienced as an uplifting, mystical and utopian vision; instead Cain experiences mythological conciousness as a burden. He is deemed an outcast, the pain he suffers at the rejection of his offerings ignored by a society and its god that is clearly defunct and warped. This places him very

much in the position of victim. In contrast to Cain, Abel cuts a powerful figure, successful, forceful and enterprising. As symbols of primary conflict, Cain and Abel represent a tension between two different ways of experiencing reality. Both are placed in a context where "God is [not] a symbol of man's own powers, but rather a symbol of force and domination having power over man"(Fromm cited in Wright 2007: 57-58). But in the narrative both characters overthrow this notion of obedience to a superior power, Cain through the building of an idol in God's image, and Abel, through emulating the actions of God in his dreams. Cain and Abel, therefore, overturn a dominant ideology, the latter through domination and the former through subversion. That they are constitutive of that same ideology is a point of heightened irony. And yet, for all the agonising and angst-filled moments of the narrative, what comes between Cain and Abel in the end is the mythical figure of woman, who both covet but one has enslaved. Consequently, Abel is not all innocence. If ever someone has retained a degree of innocence in Botes's bestial depiction of humanity, it is Cain. But that too is removed with the slaying of Abel, and the pre-eminent motive behind this symbolic murder remains envy.

4.4 CONCLUSION

In Western society Cain and Abel represent a firmly entrenched metaphor, the tradition of its use being of long-standing duration and popularity in both art and literature. Endowed with psychological and emotional significance this myth has come to stipulate a state of moral complexity through which Western society questions its own moral integrity. As mythical archetypes symbolising the first victim and first murderer they take on various

representations in their abstraction. In this regard, both Gaiman and Botes's renditions of Cain and Abel remain equally valid. It cannot be said that the one is better than the other, for through employing these mythical archetypes both denote the same psychic space, albeit differently. Diversity is key to the imagination of society. The marked differences between the two artists merely illustrate their own ingenuity and the flexibility of the metaphor. Whether situated in the realm of fine art (Botes) or tailored for a mass audience (Gaiman), done by the hand of a singular artist (Botes) or through group effort (Gaiman), with speech balloons (Gaiman) or without (Botes) - these really only constitute surface differences in relation to how the very first tale of murder invokes the origins of violence. In reflecting the knowledge of good and evil, the myth of Cain and Abel is active within all levels of society and could possibly represent a fundamental part of human development.

Whether myth is viewed as stipulating a sacred ontology or a fictional one is up to subjective experience. However, various mythologies no longer postulate living cultural realities and have instead migrated into the realm of fiction, where their symbolisms still resonate within society, held too dear to simply be lost or forgotten, and are instead retained and active within the popular imagination of a nation. Cain and Abel is one such symbolism. They are a part of the conceptual world with which Western society is for the most part familiar and could therefore be open to easy appropriation. As exemplified in Cain and Abel, mythological entities, much like their broader mythological frameworks out of which they rose, also exhibit the potential for domain shifts. Constituting protagonists within narratives, 'sacred' entities tend to migrate from text to text. Through adaptations into different mediums, ranging from book to film or other forms of art, mythical characters

leave their context of origin and live apart from their original scores. This makes the delineation between story and myth difficult to judge. Indeed, many things that were once considered myth are now taken for story, and what was once held as story is now considered myth.

> A great story can have something of the power of myth by giving shape to continuing puzzles of human experience, and it can even have the power of religion by insisting that there *are* enduring shapes beyond our transitory lives (Sanders 2006: 38).

Thus, a story exhibits some potential to promote identity, just as myth might do for people. Emotional involvement with characters in a narrative is the beginnings of living life through a story. If a fictional character constitutes a role model, influencing and shaping the behaviour of the reader, then it becomes mythical. Furthermore, through processes of identification and projection, readers become immersed within a fiction, and the characters they read about in a sense become real to them. This notion is exemplified by the natural tendency of readers to empathize with the characters they read about. A fiction could become compelling and exhibit transformative qualities, much like myths – since the act of reading removes a person from self, and therefore almost constitutes a mythical experience. Reading projects the reader into another world, a world parallel to our own, but apart from our ordinary lives. And though mythical characters like Cain and Abel might be removed from or not experienced in their original sacred ontology anymore, they could, through the discourse of fiction, become true in the collective imagination of society. As

such, they have the potential to reaffirm aspects of their old realities and retain some of their original functions, even if they are placed within a fictional context. Nevertheless, whether experienced in their mythical or literary context these

> . . .entities are here among us. They were not there from the beginning of time as (perhaps) square roots and Pythagoras's theorem were, but now that they have been created,[and furthered] by literature and nourished by our emotional investment in them, they do exist and we have come to terms with them. Let us even say, to avoid ontological and metaphysical discussions, that they exist like a cultural habitus, a social disposition. But even the universal taboo of incest is a cultural habitus, an idea, a disposition, and yet it has had the power to shape the destinies of human societies (Eco 2005: 11).

5. MYTH AND MY PERSONAL WORK

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In contemporary society mass media and telematics provide for instant communication, and ensure that myth is propagated through all social spheres, whether public or private. Mythic elements are freely codified in and carried across by televisual, film, radio, photographic, newspaper, book and magazine media. This makes for a liberal exchange of myth on a global level. Whether in its visual or narrative form, myth migrates not only from culture to culture but also form text to text. Thus, the use of mythic elements by artists, exemplified by Conrad Botes and Neil Gaiman and discussed in the previous chapter, are widespread. Whether placed locally (Botes) or internationally (Gaiman), myth remains a point of interest for some artists, because of its ability to capture a society's basic sociological, psychological, cosmological and metaphysical truths. The manner in which myth reflects certain values, beliefs, assumptions and practices, whether implicit or explicit, has the ability to denote and shape the particular character of a culture or social group. Myth as a system of signification constitutes an interpretive framework that has the possibility of not only rendering and defining the individual of a particular social group, but in turn is also employed by the individual to render and define the world.

> . . . As an antidote to dominant myths of individualism, it is instructive to be reminded that individuals are not unconstrained in their construction of meanings. Common sense suggests that 'I' am a unique individual with a stable, unified identity and ideas of my own.

> Semiotics can help us to realize that such notions are created and maintained by our engagement with sign-systems: our sense of identity is established through signs. We derive a sense of self from drawing upon conventional, pre-existing repertoires of signs and codes which we did not ourselves create. . . We are thus the subjects of our sign-systems rather than simply instrumental 'users' who are fully in control of them. While we are not determined by semiotic processes we are shaped by them far more than we realize (Chandler 2006: 217).

Myth as a symbolic language forms a part of the world of meanings familiar to and particular to each culture or social group. In defining certain aspects of a social group, myth in turn has the potential to define and shape some aspects of its individual members. Though myth might be extremely flexible in how it is conveyed to permeate all levels of social strata, it is at it most poignant and powerful when it is translated into the sphere of the individual. When myth is actively embedded and internalised in the life of the individual it becomes an affecting force that may function as a channel of meaning, which potentially orientates and gives purpose to the lives of individual members of society in terms of private, social and cultural contexts. In an artistic context the manipulation of myth generally reflects both a quest for and transmission of meaning.

As Gaiman and Botes have previously shown, no two artists illustrate the world in the same way. Coupled with a post-industrial society where the advances of techno-culture and telematics notably breed tendencies of fragmentation and separation due to over-

communication between different cultural and social spheres, mythic symbols could potentially constitute a stabilizing element since they are somewhat slower to change than the fast-paced conditions of everyday life. The symbolic manipulation of myth in art then, can provide constellating images through which these various divisionary tendencies could be integrated by the artist into some kind of overarching intention or larger whole, opening her/him up to the possibility of arriving at a reasoned knowledge, albeit subjectively, of both the public world and his/her private context. As such, most artists over time generally build a unique iconography particular to themselves. Certain visual cues are often collectively repeated in each oeuvre which tend to reflect the individual concerns and interests peculiar to each artist. The relation between the specific symbols employed by individual artists could be said to represent a personal mythology in that as a whole these symbols constitute and establish an ideological setting. This ideological setting is thoroughly personal and the symbols through which it expresses itself illuminates and determines those values according to which the artist orientates himself. Consequently, like Neil Gaiman and Conrad Botes before me, I too have become a transmitter of myth not just in terms of how I internalise it through the mythic symbols I employ, but also in how these personalized versions of myth get re-appropriated to the public domain through the realm of art, which results in the creation of new value orientations since myth is now viewed in a new, remodelled or altered state.

5.2 CREATING A PERSONAL MYTHOLOGY

Art, like myth, is always culturally conditioned. As a South African *Afrikaans*-speaking artist

my work will share contextually, as mentioned before, many similarities with that of Conrad Botes. Those similarities are rooted in the heritage of *Afrikanerdom*[40], and though Botes and I share the specifics of language and context, art, however, remains a really good metaphor for the subjectivity of perception. The metaphors we employ do differ, but our perception remains culturally and historically located in the same tradition. Tradition typically refers to the carry over of influence. In a post-apartheid society the political mythology of the previous regime, that is the symbols, rituals and myths of legitimation they employed, still pervades. These include the dominant mythology surrounding the Great Trek and the day of the Covenant on which so much of *Afrikaner* identity was and to a degree is still based. Luckily, however, with the disbanding of apartheid these myths have mostly been relieved of their explicit political purposes. These days the Covenant remains a symbol of the religious behaviour of *Afrikaners* and still portrays a central key moment in their history, but it is no longer employed for overtly political ends except perhaps by certain right-winger extremists. Changes in the historical and materialistic context of the *Afrikaner* have allowed for a modification in attitude regarding their core myths. And it should be remembered that:

> . . . myths are historical phenomena. [They] originate in specific circumstances as a product of specific interests, and they change with the changing interests of successive generations and successive

[40] Currently, in post-apartheid South-Africa, *Afrikanerdom* or *Afrikaners* does not relate a cast-iron identity as was once perhaps so carefully constructed during apartheid. *Afrikanerdom* in post-apartheid South-Africa does not reflect a homogeneous, unified group of people, instead it consists of many *Afrikaans*-speaking sub-groups that span a wide range of racial and social spheres within South-Africa. For the purposes of this thesis, however, when I use the terms of *Afrikanerdom*, *Afrikaners* or *Afrikaans*-speaking South-Africans, I refer predominantly to the white population of South-Africa who speak *Afrikaans* as their first language and specifically excludes those black or coloured social groups of South-Africa who do too.

> regimes. They vary in intensity: they may be dormant, they may flourish, they may decline, they may die out. Myths also change in substance and meaning. (Thompson 1985: 9).

If the previous regime has illustrated anything, it is to what extent myth can be manipulated to serve diffuse ends, good or bad. The state, as a dominant institution in the modern world, tends to exert a profound influence on the popular consciousness of its inhabitants. Broadly speaking this holds a bitter-sweet truth when applied to the *Afrikaner.* But the symbols, myths and rituals entrenched by the Nationalists in the previous regime have now become an independent force, and though some have been lost or discarded, others have undergone transformation and endured to serve the interests of successive generations. This demonstrates to what extent humanity has the capacity to modify mythologies in the face of local or global change.

In creating a personal mythology past images, then, are still viable. For like any mythology, a personal mythology denotes the arrangement of mythical contents in differing narratives contained within a larger whole. Personal mythologies, like other mythologies, are rooted in the context of the individual who entertains them. And like any other corpus of myths they too have the ability to reflect historical and cultural developments. The creation of my own personal mythology is irrevocably tied to and inspired by my *Afrikaner* heritage. The symbols it is comprised of have all been employed in an attempt to learn to live with and make sense of the period of history I find myself in as an *Afrikaner*, to come to an understanding and to live according to my own ideals in the face of once dominant, but

now disbanding ideologies characteristic of a post-apartheid society. Much of the iconography that *Afrikaans*-speaking South Africans identified with in the past still remain in effect as defining elements of the *Afrikaner* today. As such, my personal mythology constitutes mythic archetypes and symbols central to *Afrikaner* tradition, but which as an artist I have consequently externalized in a comic book narrative titled *Gifpit*.

5.2.1 GIFPIT

Gifpit comprises the practical component of my personal work and has inspired this thesis topic. It has entailed the composition of both text and visual imagery by myself and is not merely the illustration of someone else's story. The format of the final portfolio piece is in the shape of a comic book. The title refers to a little *Karoo dorpie* in the middle of nowhere, which functions as an overarching context for a range of fragmentary yet related narratives. The vast expanse of the *Karoo* has ensured that the characters involved have been predominantly living in a state of isolation. Contact with the outside world occurs rarely, if ever. This has intensified their vices, virtues or innocent quirks to such an extent that they form consistent and definite parts of their personalities. The setting of the *Karoo,* that at times can be both invigorating or debilitating in its immense emptiness, was to me an apt equivalent for the closed-off nature of the *Afrikaner,* a way in which he/she generally viewed him/herself with regards to history and culture. *Gifpit*, with its inhabitants living in a state of emotional and geographic alienation, functions as a microcosm reflecting the removed character of a society that once traditionally viewed itself as apart from the rest of the world, a view that was historically brought about by the fears of a small, white

community amidst a vast majority of black peoples indigenous to the Southern African region. Coupled with the geographic location at the tip of Africa, far removed from Europe and Western civilization, this state of cultural and social isolation came to be entrenched by the policy of apartheid which once ensured separation regarding development of different ethnic groups, and was further enforced by international sanctions regarding travel and commerce because of its application. Apartheid has now been disbanded, but much of its influence remains, especially in terms of the ideologies and symbols it has either entrenched or supported. It is possible, I believe, to discuss the *Afrikaner* without having to allude to apartheid, but with regards to the topic of this thesis the problem lies with the fact that those myths and mythic symbols employed by apartheid also constitute key narratives on which *Afrikaner* identity formation is mostly based. However, though the founding myths of *Afrikaner* identity have been greatly manipulated by the previous regime for its political ends, they do still constitute a part of the *Afrikaner* heritage and, as such, remain largely active within the imagination of *Afrikaans*-speaking South Africans today, with or without the help of apartheid.

Growing up in the transition period between old and new regimes I was formed to a great extent by the ideological mindset of apartheid as it was perpetuated in my family context. I was brought up with a strong sense of family and shared with my parents the group values of conservatism, patriarchy and Calvinism characteristic of *Afrikaner* society at that time. Nowadays, much has changed and yet much has stayed the same. I think that *Afrikaners* for the most part do still exhibit a strong religious conviction, elements of conservatism have been retained in our adherence to group values, and *Afrikaners* do still feel isolated

as a small white minority at the tip of Africa. Old attitudes and beliefs mostly persist and have been preserved within the microcosm of family, but have undergone changes in regards to how they have been applied by a successive generation of *Afrikaners*, who have been brought up with the values of their parents but mostly do not share the same context that once engendered those beliefs. This is the context I find myself in, and it is also the context responsible for the creation of *Gifpit*.

Gifpit literally translates both as 'poisonseed' or 'poisonpit' and to me is a tongue-in-cheek, yet acerbic title for a town whose inhabitants are strange and peculiar. Situated amid the arid expanse of the *Karoo*, the town has two defining features (excluding the inhabitants), namely on the one side a church placed on very high stilts (fig.11) and on the other an abyss, much resembling the Big Hole of Kimberley. The abyss figuratively functions as a symbol of those depths of the psyche that cannot be fathomed, whilst literally in the narrative, as an element of landscape, it exudes a strange, distorted and sublime influence on the psychological state of the inhabitants. The degree to which *Gifpit* is tied to some of the old ideologies and beliefs, which do still float around in the conciousness of *Afrikaners* today, even if they certainly seem anachronistic, is perhaps best illustrated with the church. In one of *Gifpit'*s many stories, titled *Die Vloed* (The Flood), the leading protagonist, *Dominee Hendrik Bitterbal*, has a dream in which the expanse of the *Karoo* will be covered by a great flood. Drawing a direct relation to its Biblical counterpart, *Bitterbal* consequently interprets his dream as a premonition sent by God. Under the leadership of their *dominee* the inhabitants of the town are harnessed into modifying their comely, albeit unassuming church into a holy ark. Modestly perched on ground level the church was consecutively

raised up on ever higher stilts, it was envisioned that if water came underneath it it would float like a boat. The inhabitants waited and waited, but no flood ever came. The *Karoo* remained a desert and the only rains they saw was the general 300 – 500 mm, which mostly occur in summer. Subsequently, for Sunday services the town's inhabitants have to climb a very steep and rickety ladder to reach their place of worship This has proven a difficulty for some of the older members of the congregation. To me this narrative arch constitutes a gently mockery, if not subtle, of the beliefs a much older generation of *Afrikaners* held regarding the *Bible*, and the relation they drew with the Israelites in viewing themselves as a 'chosen people'[41] appointed by God to be a civilizing force in deepest, darkest Africa. This is a notion which gained official standing and popularity when it was entrenched by the Nationalists and successively maintained and sustained through church and state. Nowadays, the myth of *Afrikaners* as a 'chosen people' has lost its fervour, yet its flavour is still felt, especially in *Afrikaans* literature with a historic context or subject matter alluding to the Great Trek mythology and the Anglo-Boer war.

As a narrative *Gifpit* generally plays on those traditional tenets of *Afrikaner* society, conservatism, isolationism and Calvinism, constituting a heritage which was more often than not imparted with a stern hand and a deadly seriousness. But it is not so much the narrative of *Gifpit* that I wish to discuss, rather it is the symbols I employ. Most of these embody stereotypes characteristic of South African *Afrikaans*-speaking society, such as the *dominee*, the *dominee se vrou*, the *ouma*, the *boer* etc. I deliberately populated the various stories of *Gifpit* with *Afrikaner* stereotypes, because as stereotypes they tend to be

[41] The Great Trek was “frequently compared to the biblical story of the Israelites' flight from Egypt to the Promised Land, an analogy that constructed the *Afrikaner* as a chosen people” (Petzold 2007: 126). Consequently, religion often fills a central part in many traditional *Afrikaner* tales regarding the Great Trek.

limited in their expression, and as such, reflect to me the inbred quality inherent in a closed-off society. Stereotypes, however, also bear a correlation to mythical archetypes and can channel deeper significance if they have been endowed with a greater sense of meaning. For all their stereotypical traits, the characters of *Gifpit* do constitute mythical archetypes. Though they might seem shallow on a surface reading it is through their subtext that they deepen and resonate on a personal level. These characters function as mythic symbols which I have placed in a personal narrative in an attempt to relate to my heritage as an *Afrikaner* on a more conscious level. Through the interaction of these characters with each other the symbolic values they express are placed in opposition to each other. Manipulated by the flow of the narrative they formulate a way for me to come to grips with my own context as a South-African *Afrikaans*-speaking individual, and the symbols of my heritage themselves. This is one of the reasons why the characters of *Gifpit* constitute a personal mythology. For that reason I wish to elaborate on three characters that are key to the narrative of *Gifpit* in an attempt to broaden those mythic metaphors, both stereotypical and archetypical, by which the *Afrikaner* still conceptualizes his/her identity, for the most part, today.

5.2.2 OUMA

Gifpit is comprised of numerous characters, but for practical purposes only three will be discussed. The first of these is the protagonist known as *Ouma* (fig. 12). She does not cut the usual figure of a kind old lady. If anything, she is old, but not kind. In the narratives she constitutes a mastermind and manipulator with great occultic potentialities that she rarely uses. Her nature is not quite human; often her feet do not touch the ground and she floats

about. The inhabitants of *Gifpit* try not to notice and hide behind their ignorance, yet in their hearts they fear her. I define her as a corrupted figure in terms of age and her ethical motivations. She is decidedly off-kilter in her morality and achieving her ends, which for the most part are well-intended, are often achieved by unethical means. However, for all her distressing qualities she also functions as a protector of the town, resolving problems and guiding the inhabitants with a firm and steady hand. This is *Ouma* in a nutshell. I often find it strange how a fictional character like *Ouma*, comprising loosely of a bunch of thoughts, values, feelings, statements and physical appearance can all be held together by a proper name and consequently project a whole. Even though a fictional character can not be experienced in its entirety, for its qualities and actions are only those specified by the text, it bears reference in relation to our experience of other human beings which too tend to be incomplete. As a fictional character *Ouma* owes her existence to my imagination and is formed by my use of language. It is logical to assume that the metaphors and symbolisms entrenched in the worldview of my mother-tongue will also be active in the point of view this character reflects within the narrative. Every point of view is derived from a repertoire of conventions and attitudes. And in every language the symbolic is defined by its ability to convey secondary meanings. When these notions are applied to characters in fiction, they open up and become alive with significance, especially if it was a conscious decision on the author's part.

As such, the character of *Ouma* can both denote a fictional entity within a story and serve as a symbol. On a private level this character forms a part of my personal mythology since she is largely based on my own grandmother who died a few years ago. Raised in the

Christian tradition of the Calvinists, *Ouma* functions to my mind as a symbol constituting a point of mediation between heaven and hell. This is largely the reason for her otherworldly abilities in *Gifpit*. On a less personal note she can also be construed as the mythical archetype of the 'guide' or 'counsellor' popular in world mythology. In this framework she denotes a figure of authority that often imparts wisdom or steers a protagonist in his decisions regarding life, much like the tales regarding the water nymph Egeria in Roman tradition. In a local context I equate her with the mythical construct of the *Volksmoeder*. The notion of the *Volksmoeder* was popularized by the patriarchal ideology of the Nationalists and is representative of the ideal *Afrikaner* woman. It was a “construct that glorified the role of women in the [Great] Trek and the Anglo-Boer War” (Petzold 2007: 125). It subsequently involved the emulation of certain characteristics such as “a sense of religion, bravery, a love of freedom, the spirit of sacrifice, self-reliance, housewifeliness, nurturance of talents, integrity, virtue and the setting of examples to others” (Stockenstrom cited in Petzold 2007: 125-126). *Volksmoeder* literally means 'mother of the nation' and though *Ouma* might not be the mother of a nation, she reflects this mythical archetype in that she functions very much as a mother to the inhabitants of *Gifpit*. Within the narrative *Ouma* constitutes a matriarch and is placed in direct opposition to *Ds. Bitterbal*'s patriarchal views that generally dominate the town. The problem with the construct of the *Volksmoeder* was that although it glorified the position of women within *Afrikaner* society, especially during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it still placed them in a position of subordination with regards to an active patriarchal system. The rise of subsequent suffrage movements organized by South African women have largely abolished this notion. But the mythical archetype of the *Volksmoeder* remains a core

image, richly embedded for the most part in *Afrikaner* conciousness. I for one grew up with this mythical symbol and it has not been discarded,it has been kept alive by the history of the Great Trek and the Anglo-Boer War. However, with regards to my own work its application becomes more dynamic and its discourse opened. For as much as *Ouma* is constitutive of the *Volksmoeder* she is also its dark reflection. She functions as an inversion of all those ideals once held to be the paragon of *Afrikaner* womanhood. She has no sense of religion, she enjoys the spirit of sacrifice (in others), the examples she sets none would like to follow and although she could be deemed brave and self-reliant, her virtue is notably dubious and her ethics questionable. She is decidedly non-conformist and thoroughly undermines male-supremacy. As such, the mythical archetype she embodies functions on various levels due to the wide range of connotations it embodies. The structure of its semantic domain has the ability to communicate in several channels simultaneously, eliciting both experience and emotion.

5.2.3 BITTERBAL

Another image at the core of *Afrikanerdom* is the *Dominee*. In *Gifpit* this role is fulfilled by *Ds. Hendrik Bitterbal* (fig. 13), a narrow-minded and bigoted man who could be deemed amusing in his simplicity. As the religious leader of the town he denotes the overall authority figure, who preaches his patriarchal and puritanical views as much on Sundays as any other day. As a personal symbol he was based on my uncle, a colonel in the airforce before he committed suicide, and *Ds. Steyn*, a frightening and terrifying individual when it came to my personal churchgoing experiences. In the narrative he is brooding, indignant, always serious and suffering from a strange state of melancholy. His surname is

a bit of vulgarism on my part – '*Bitterbal*' in *Afrikaans* can be taken as reference for an acrimonious sexual organ. His name relates to his nature: for all his depression and gloom *Bitterbal* is also very libidinal. In *Gifpit* he generally expounds a narrow-minded and autocratic worldview. His solutions to conflict, for the most part, are too simplistic to solve them and often humorous consequences occur when the inhabitants of the town decide to follow them. In *Afrikaans* culture *Bitterbal* represents the stereotype of a *Dopper*. Traditionally it was thought that a good *Afrikaner* was strictly Calvinist, an austere puritan, especially in matters of sex, and a worshipper of the past, but it was not necessarily so. I do think, however, that the stereotype remains and is still a somewhat favoured

representation of the *Afrikaner* and his past in South Africa. *Doppers*[42] generally represented the most conservative trends in *Afrikaner* religion and constituted a minority within *Afrikaans* culture. At the heart of *Dopper* theology was “the Calvinist conception of the sovereignty of God in every aspect of life and the acceptance of the Bible as the only source of belief and practice” (Thompson 1985: 32). This stark representation served my ends well, for in an *Afrikaner* society with a deep religious conviction, the metaphysical agency of God the Father is directly linked to its material counterpart, namely the patriarchy of the church.

Perhaps the importance of *Dominees* in *Afrikaner* consciousness was attached to the role Sarel Cilliers played in the Great Trek mythology of the Covenant. In the absence of an ordained minister, Cilliers fulfilled the role of religious leader at the battle of Blood River,

[42] *Dopper* is derived from the Dutch word 'domper' which means: extinguisher. They belonged to the smallest, most conservative churches in South Africa and they were referred to as *Doppers*, because it was said that they believed in extinguishing the light of the Enlightenment (Thompson 1985: 31).

confirming the covenant with God in prayer. Later the primacy of Cilliers's role as religious leader was elevated by his deathbed statement on the events at Blood River which was edited and published by H.J. Hofstede in 1876 and later became the principle source of information pertaining to the myth of the Covenant (Thompson 1985: 166). The myth of the Covenant irrevocably tied the *Afrikaner* to his God by confirming the Afrikaner's rightful place in Africa. The Great Trek was central to *Afrikaner* nationalist mythology and at its heart was the Covenant with its deeply religious overtones, successively ensuring that the state of religion and its authorities would have an important role to play in *Afrikaner* society, as legitimised by this myth. Consequently, state and religion became somewhat tangled, since the ideology of the previous regime could be taken for a distinct brand of nationalism as based on Christian values. Politics was preached as much from the pulpit as from the stateroom.

In the narrative of *Gifpit* I employed *Bitterbal* not so much as a mythical symbol in his own right, but more as a propagator of ideology. During apartheid its politics was expounded by both church and state. In a society that cultivated attitudes of conservatism, conformity and obedience to governmental and religious institutions, *dominees* as figures of authority held a lot of influence. They often denoted ultra-conservative nationalists whose opinions held a lot of sway in both rural and urban *Afrikaner* communities. Since the Christian mythology was entrenched in the ideology of the state through the myth of the Covenant, it was employed politically and its values were applied according to the dicta of authority. The religiosity of the *Afrikaner* in part justified the acceptance of the existing state of affairs, exemplified in the condition of apartheid. Religion was often employed as a means of

legitimising the racial policies of the government. The problem here lies with the fact that religious justification often results in a situation where people do not question those 'existing states of affairs' and are not encouraged to change them, but instead to bear them, because the arrangements where that of the Divine Will.

The *Afrikaner* nationalist ideology concentrated on providing legitimacy for their racial policies, and the course of action they advocated was often echoed by the churches. One means by which this was achieved was through the individual *Afrikaner* myths of the '*Swart*'[43] and '*Rooi gevaar*' – which represented the perceived security threats to the then South African government by either its indigenous black inhabitants or communist forces. These two myths were propagated and perpetuated by churchmen and statesmen alike in an attempt to portray the *Afrikaner* as "the only group capable of maintaining the norms and values of Western civilisation in the face of the onslaught of black domination, communism and morale-sapping liberalism" (Kerr 2006: 137). As such, xenophobia was encouraged. The irony of it all was that although the nationalist *Afrikaner* ideology was based on 'sound' Christian principles with its idealistic sense of morality, it supported the policy of apartheid which can only be described as morally evil. The *Afrikaner* nationalist ideology did not promote a state of general welfare in its own society, the moral principles it projected were not conducive to domestic and social well-being. Consequently, *Bitterbal* is not symbolic of a defunct ideology, but rather symbolises an individual through which a defunct ideology is promoted and perpetuated.

[43] It is interesting to note that the term *swart gevaar* in a post-apartheid era does not so much refer to a perceived security threat anymore, but is now more employed in the context of culture. This myth has largely expanded its semantics to refer to a cultural threat; it was perceived by some *Afrikaners* that *Afrikaans* culture would loose its identity or disappear once they assimilated with the rest of black South Africa.

In the narrative of *Gifpit* he represents an old orientation of *Afrikanerdom* that has mostly been discarded in the context of post-apartheid South Africa, but which still makes its presence felt. According to Jung, when an old orientation is lost a new one is needed (1998: 24). This relates directly to Nietzsche's formulation on the *death of god* as preached by Zarathustra. To Nietzsche the *death of god* referred to the demise of an old orientation as defined by the principle of 'God' in Western society. With the loss of this once dominant referent (but which has only actually been reduced), a new one is needed. Nietzsche employed Zarathustra to expound a new 'truth' according to which lives might be organised and lived in the West. A central philosophical concern for Nietzsche was the creation of new values; he invented Zarathustra to promote values other than those based on Christian-Platonic ideals, which he considered to be defunct in European culture (Gooding-Williams 2001: 5). With the fall of apartheid and the loss of its most dominant ideology, *Afrikaans*-speaking South Africans also needed to transform themselves according to new principles. In the narrative of *Gifpit*, *Bitterbal* is symbolic of old ideals that have lost much of their relevance and function in current society, and this is illustrated through his inability as a leader to resolve conflict or successfully mediate situations. The secular trends promoted by Nietzsche are also relevant to the state of *Afrikaner* society during apartheid, in that it propagates not unfailing loyalty to an ideology that could only be deemed defective. This is exemplified in the case of *Bitterbal*'s unflagging commitment to his worldview, which is often questioned by the worldly nature of most of the town's inhabitants and serves as a counterpoint to his narrow-minded sense of vision in the narrative.

Lastly, it could be said that in the context of *Afrikaner* culture, religion was a key element in the production of the *Afrikaner* nationalist ideology and was crucial to its maintenance. The degree to which religious practice in *Afrikaner* society, propagated by *dominees* like *Bitterbal,* promoted and legitimised the racial policies of the government and the condition of apartheid constitutes an example of Marx's first critique of religion as reconciliation mentioned in chapter three. During apartheid religion was employed as a means of social control that legitimised and justified the state of society and its inherent condition according to those ideas once held dominant to the ruling white minority. Religion, therefore, functioned as reconciliation, since it reconciled members of *Afrikaner* society to the immoral ideology of apartheid, stating that the world as it is is what it should be. *Afrikaners* came to be aligned with an unjust ideology as perpetuated and justified through church and state. Secondly, the degree to which the *Afrikaner* nationalist ideology was amplified by its religious component can be illustrated by the fact that religious language and behaviour are not just beliefs and acts about the world, but also constitutes an actual way through which a particular world or worldview comes into being. The worldview the *Afrikaner* nationalist ideology propagated was doubly magnified in its influence by including these religious overtones within its make-up.

Consequently, its intensity was not just found in the social sphere of politics, but also of the spirit. In both cases its principles functioned as a constricting factor, and it was often adhered to beyond critical discourse because of religion's ability to engender emotional, passionate and often irrational experiences. Religion as purported by apartheid also conformed to Marx's third critique of religion as ideology. In the hands of the Nationalist

government religion helped in maintaining and sustaining the Nationalist's ideas regarding South Africa, what its social relations ought to be, what is morally and aesthetically correct and what values and attitudes should be followed. According to Marxism, this did not represent a true image of the world and its relations since it perpetuated the worldview and values of the dominant social group. Through maintaining and promoting the material interests of the white minority in South-Africa the *Afrikaner* nationalist ideology produced a 'false state of conciousness', to use Marx's words. Through its circulation it sustained a mistaken picture of reality, but to the extent to which it had been justified it was considered true by members of the *Afrikaner* society. In this respect, figures like *Bitterbal* helped to maintain a defunct ideology by detracting and distracting attention from the inherent social, political and economic injustices of apartheid, since it was legitimised in part under the rubric of religion.

5.2.4 VREEMDELING

Another prominent protagonist in *Gifpit* is the *Vreemdeling*. The inhabitants of the town refer to him as the 'Stranger', after finding him one morning in the middle of the main street having seemingly come out of nowhere. Within their closed-off community he is an outsider and is constitutive of the Other in both psychological and physical nature. Pale, hairless and mostly silent, he takes the form of a white albino (fig. 14). His state can only be described as otherworldly, and though *Ouma* also exudes otherworldly qualities, her condition is firmly rooted in practicality, whilst his is of a more ethereal nature. In the narrative he is symbolic of a Christ-like figure exuding a child-like innocence. But for all his purity and naiveté he embodies a terrible threat, like a suicide bomber unaware of his

condition while the clock is ticking. The inhabitants of *Gifpit* are unconsciously aware of the subsequent BOOM! and slightly curious, but only *Ouma* and a few other characters are perceptive of the imminent danger this implies. It does not mean that he is going to literally explode in the narrative, but symbolically he carries within him some hidden terror that will be frightening in its consequences for the town once it is released. Initially, the *Vreemdeling* suffers from memory loss, he has no recollection of his past nor does he know his name or who he is. However, in the story he was brought to life by that figure of infinite authority, the Christian God who placed within him an aspect of the Final Judgement. This is the terror he conveys, but which is only ever alluded too. He is symbolic of the sublime, representative of all those powers too vast to be contained in normal forms of life.

The semantic potentialities of this character are immense, he constitutes a structure that practically exudes mythical connotations. Therefore, I think it best to look at him merely from a local context and not in the sense of how he relates to mythical archetypes popular to the imagination of *Afrikaners*. I created him to be symbolic of a dead metaphor. A dead metaphor can be equated with a tired myth. Inspired by the Biblical tradition so fundamental to *Afrikaner* heritage, the *Vreemdeling* functions as a symbol constitutive of an ideology that has become autocratic. In the past religion, conformity and obedience constituted vital elements in the development of attitudes which would ensure the formation of correct thinking with regards to church and state. Applied to the Christian upbringing that most *Afrikaners* have experienced, religious obedience and conformity was praised. Churchgoing became an important means by which *Afrikaner* society could be

controlled as the "*dominees* could give the assurance that racial purity and all the other desirable traits had the blessing of the Almighty" (Kerr 2006: 136). In post-apartheid South-Africa much of the ideals and conformist attitudes supported by the Nationalists where or are perpetuated within the smaller social unit of the family. Even though the regime has come to an end, some of its old influences can still be felt. In this respect, the *Vreemdeling* is symbolic of a Christian mythology that has become oppressive in its application and influence. He represents a dead metaphor, a myth that according to Waardenburg detracts from reality, and is used to bind people and keep them under control (1980: 58). "These are myths of domination, which imprison people so that they can see and judge reality only in a particular light. Myth here does not open up reality but narrows it down" (Waardenburg 1980: 58). The *Vreemdeling* consequently refers to an oppressive ideology, constituting a myth that could be deemed tired in both a society's obsession with it and its ability to narrow perception, which I think eventually results in a weariness of its influence.

The *Vreemdeling* bears evidence in relation to Karl Marx's formulation of ideologies perpetuating a false state of consciousness, as mentioned previously in chapter two. In the context of Classical Marxism Marx stated that religion constitutes an ideology in the sense that it is an alienated form of conciousness that obfuscates, whilst carefully keeping the real relations of the world intact. To him, religion construes a false image of man and leads to estrangement since it denies the true reality of himself (Kee 1990: 45). In the context of *Gifpit* the *Vreemdeling* embodies this notion of the 'false image of man' and therefore constitutes the Other. Usually with regards to South Africa and its colonial heritage, the Other is represented in the indigenous peoples. However, in *Gifpit*, the *Vreemdeling*

represents the Other on a surface level through being an outsider, otherworldly and different in physical appearance to the inhabitants. But it is in his embodiment of Marx's notion of 'a false image of man' that his symbolism becomes most poignant. He literally represents, according to Marx, a false state of conciousness, an alien reality made manifest. In the narrative he is symbolic of the inhabitants' Christian religion, but through him their ideology becomes inverted and is turned back on them, with the ability to hurt. At his core the *Vreemdeling* is representative of a myth of domination that in its oppression has the potential to dehumanize society, and this is the reason for the inherent danger implied in him. A myth of domination constitutes a tired metaphor that when employed not only alienates and estranges people from themselves and the world, but also from others. This makes for an apt observation when applied to the politics of apartheid, when church and state was once so closely intertwined.

5.3. CONCLUSION

The fictional characters that comprise *Gifpit* constitute a personal mythology in that each character embodies a specific constellation of values. Every character denotes his own point of view derived from a set of conventions and attitudes born of my personal context. As such, they function as symbols on a deeply personal level, especially since many of the key characters in the narrative are based on various family members and friends who have passed away, and therefore constitute a means by which I can keep their memory alive. Although in *Gifpit* they are predominantly construed as stereotypes of *Afrikanerdom,* they are capable of becoming mythical and exhibit qualities of a more numinous nature. They do this firstly through their ability, as fictional characters, to constitute life models. As soon

as a character in a book becomes internalized, the nucleus of values it embodies is emulated in and applied to the life of the individual, it constitutes a life model. The metaphor it embodies becomes mythical and posits a semantic structure through which a person can interpret the world, bringing both understanding and realisation with regards to private and public contexts. Although fictional characters are not usually invoked, appeased or petitioned, they can function like gods in traditional mythology to a certain degree, in constituting principles (if they have been internalized) according to which a person might organize his life. This makes for a relevant point in a society where it becomes more and more difficult to delineate what constitutes myth or story. Secondly, fictional characters become mythical when they are tied to mythical archetypes or other mythical elements. In the context of *Gifpit*, the characters have become mythical in representing certain mythical archetypes at the core of *Afrikaner* conciousness and also by being connected to the greater, cultural myth heritage of *Afrikanerdom* in less overt ways.

In considering my personal work and its relation to *Afrikaner* mythology I have endeavoured to show that certain core images remain, but have often undergone change with regards to substance and meaning. And though some symbols have been discarded and others retained, changing in their status as new values are added, they are still tied to a heritage and have the ability to convey a sense of meaning deepened by history and tradition. Since society is not static and is always in motion, humanity expresses a great capacity for the modification of its myths. In a post-apartheid society much of the Nationalist mythology associated with the *Afrikaner* has been displaced. In its stead the New South Africa is now defined according to myths of truth, reconciliation, affirmative

action, diversity, forgiveness, solidarity and Ubuntu, even though that mythical symbol of the Rainbow nation has come and gone. As myths migrate from text to text and culture to culture, they are open to re-appropriation by other social groups which, in turn, will interpret them according to their own set of conventions and attitudes particular to their worldview. With this in mind, if *Gifpit* is appropriated for example by the Xhosa-speaking peoples indigenous to South Africa, then the fictional character of *Ouma* might well be construed as a *sangoma*. Rooted in the beliefs of ancestral spirits, a *sangoma* forms a point of mediation between the afterlife and this world, as *Ouma* does in the narrative of *Gifpit*. There are many similarities between *Ouma* and a *sangoma*; both are highly respected and revered within their community, both have the ability to counsel, divine and heal and both try to keep the world of the living harmonious with that of the dead. In this regard *Ouma*, as a mythical symbol, posits a structure that can have any content. Its semantic domain will depend on what framework it is appropriated in, how it is applied and with what meaning it is imbued. Through the manipulation of the mythic symbols I have employed in *Gifpit* I have tried to expand some key metaphors *Afrikaans*-speaking South Africans, for the most part, still use in formulating and defining their identity today, thereby broadening the perspective through which we, as *Afrikaners*, could conceptualize our place and ourselves in the context of a current South Africa.

6. CONCLUSION

Human beings exhibit a great capacity for the modification and transformation of myth and its symbols in the light of changing circumstances. In chapter two I looked at how this tendency was expressed in ancient Greek society by tracing the change in attitude prominent Greek philosophers like Plato, Plutarch and Aristotle had towards myth. It follows that the rationalistic and secular approaches to myth as established by traditional Greek culture have remained influential, but have been respectively furthered by modern thinkers within the various fields of anthropology, philosophy, linguistics and psychology. Currently, the semantic domain of myth now embodies a much broader scope than it did for the Greeks, allowing for greater insight in how myth might function in contemporary society and what it might mean to the individual.

A myth functions best when it is actively embedded within the life of a community, and nowhere are those values central to society more clearly expressed than in its dominant religion. For that reason, chapter three discussed religion as a more obvious example of how an explicit mythological expression can engender a living, breathing cultural reality. In order to prove how such a reality, in this case exemplified in the defining referent of 'God', could be destabilised and its ideological hold on society reduced, leading to the re-appropriation of its mythical symbolisms within other conceptual domains separate from their original contexts of use. Consequently, chapter three showed how a rising culture of intellectualism, personified in the likes of Lyotard, Marx and Nietzsche, coupled with religious relativity, new ideas regarding the world as postulated by science, telematics and

techno-culture, has placed religion as a dominant mythical expression in a somewhat precarious position. This, however, has not brought about the end of myth, for new myths continuously develop as the material conditions of society changes. It merely illustrates a change in status of certain mythical cosmologies, since what was once deemed truth, or even ultimate truth, has now migrated into the realm of fiction.

Chapter four explored how mythical symbolisms are retained in society through the discourse of fiction, no matter if some of the worldviews they once supported no longer exists. One instance of the broad-scale re-appropriation of myth and mythic symbols into fiction can be found in the realm of comics. Comics are one form of cultural production in contemporary society responsible for the widespread reinterpretation and recapturing of myth through image, word and symbol. Chapter four looked at how comics artists such as Neil Gaiman and Conrad Botes are responsible in part for the reloading of mythical content back into society through their own individual works. In the end, the discussion on Gaiman and Botes's showed how the realm of art might re-interpret traditional mythical trappings through a contemporary context, thereby creating another frame of reference through which these metaphors could be experienced, which results in an expansion of myth's original semantics since the metaphor employed is now extended beyond its normal familiarity as stipulated by its original discourse.

In my final chapter I explore this notion more fully as applied to my local context. Chapter five looked at how the various ideologies of *Afrikaner* society, as stipulated by its myths, has influenced my own conception of context and self expressed in my art as an *Afrikaans*-

speaking South African artist. The degree to which *Gifpit* is comprised of mythic archetypes and symbols central to *Afrikaner* tradition shows to what extent the iconography that *Afrikaans* speaking individuals identified with in the past still remain in effect as defining elements of the *Afrikaner* today. In my own case, personalised versions of *Afrikaner* myth get re-appropriated into the public domain through the realm of art, which results in the creation of new value orientations since myth is now viewed in a new, remodelled or altered state. If published, *Gifpit* might well be responsible for expanding the semantic domains of some of the key metaphors through which *Afrikaners* define themselves. It could possibly broaden the perspective that *Afrikanerdom* employs to formulate and imagine its unique identity, and thereby, open its discourse to a much more dynamic and complex conception of itself, whether placed in the context of culture or individual.

Myth has ever remained a mainstay of human thought and life. The functions it has fulfilled in the past are much the same it does today, since, I would say, that the human condition in its fundamentality has not changed, it is still driven by the same basic yearnings and desires. However, as a symbolic form of knowledge about world, that, unlike science, is based more on emotion rather than the intellect, myth tends to relate more directly to the life of the individual, and his/her experience thereof. As such, myth could fulfil a therapeutic role in society by providing an alternative frame of reference from which the world could be understood, but only if it is employed in its capacity to elaborate on comprehension, rather than restricting. In a post-1994 South Africa myth might well function as a symbolic point of mediation between past atrocities, as exemplified in colonialism and apartheid, and the

consequences thereof, experienced presently. Allowing members of society to engage, relate, and come to terms with the current condition of South Africa, thereby reconciling the life of the individual with his/her context as a whole, by providing a more fuller comprehension of what the totality of his/her existence might entail as defined by that selfsame relation.

What I find interesting is how the cultural reality a myth might engender and the mythical symbolisms that supports it, could be re-appropriated within the discourse of fiction. Most interesting of all are the implications that arise out of this occurrence. According to Mircea Eliade's conception of the sacred/profane duality (1957: 11), myth could be taken as constitutive of the sacred, fiction of the profane. When myth is reduced to mere story, then its mythological system no longer conveys the dimension of the 'pre-eminently real', but rather one of fictionality. As such, myth migrates from postulating a 'religious world', in a loose sense of the term, to a fictional world. Its once sacred ontology is now reduced to the profane. The symbolisms of myth are no longer viewed as the living embodiments of core values definitive of life and culture, constituting a primary universe, but rather as fictional formulations, embodying a secondary universe in the imagination of man. What is most intriguing, however, is how fiction posits its own truth within its frame of reference and can denote an almost mythical experience through the act of reading, which tends to transpose or project individuals into another world, parallel to our own but apart form our ordinary lives, thereby momentarily breaking the profane condition of everyday existence. If a mythological system is appropriated within fiction it could be taken as a discourse that moves from first stipulating the sacred, then the profane and then the sacred again, since

fiction within its own framework can in turn state the sacred or be re-appropriated by it. Myth's ability to be reduced to fiction, and fiction's capacity to become mythic does not make for an easy delineation between these two respective modes of representing and organising knowledge. But, the degree of import and emotion often attached to these separate symbolic representations by contemporary society shows to what extent humanity is more than just its material circumstances, and, therefore, cannot be completely demythologised or desacralised. The world will remain mysterious, in man's inability to wholly demystify himself.

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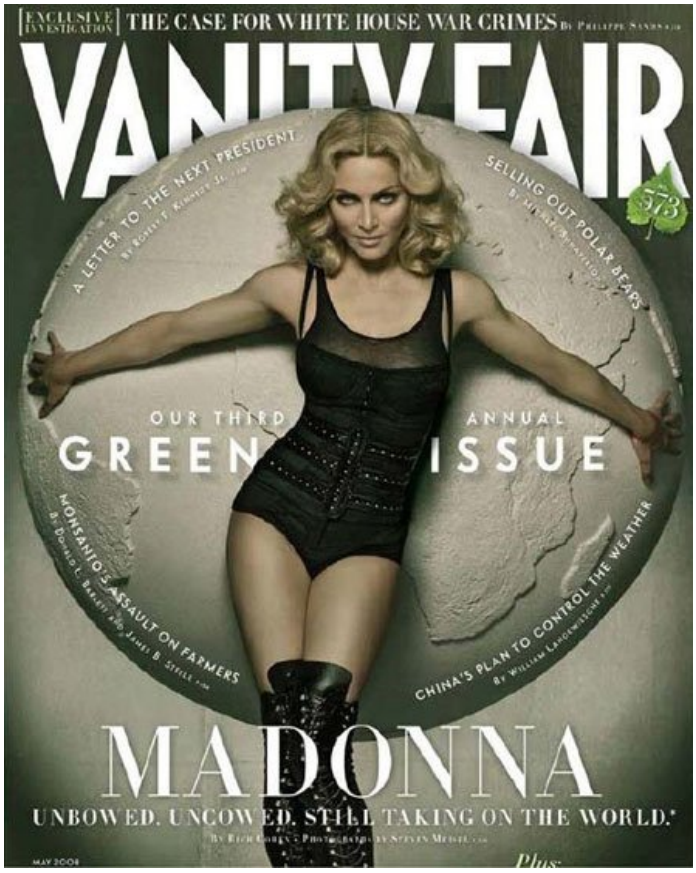


Fig. 1. Madonna, *Vanity Fair* magazine cover. May 2008 [Online]. Available: http://justjared.buzznet.com/2008/03/27/madonna_vanity-fair_green_issue_2008/

Fig. 2. The Holy Virgin, [Online].
Available: http://www.mother-god.com/goddess-mother-mary.html

Fig. 3. Neil Gaiman & Sam Keith, selection from The Sandman: Predludes & Nocturnes (1988).

Fig. 4. Neil Gaiman & Mike Dringenberg, selection from The Sandman: The Doll's House (1990).

Fig. 5. Neil Gaiman & Jill Thompson, selection from *The Sandman: Fables & Reflections* (1993).

Fig. 6. Neil Gaiman & Jill Thompson, selection from *The Sandman: Fables & Reflections* (1993).

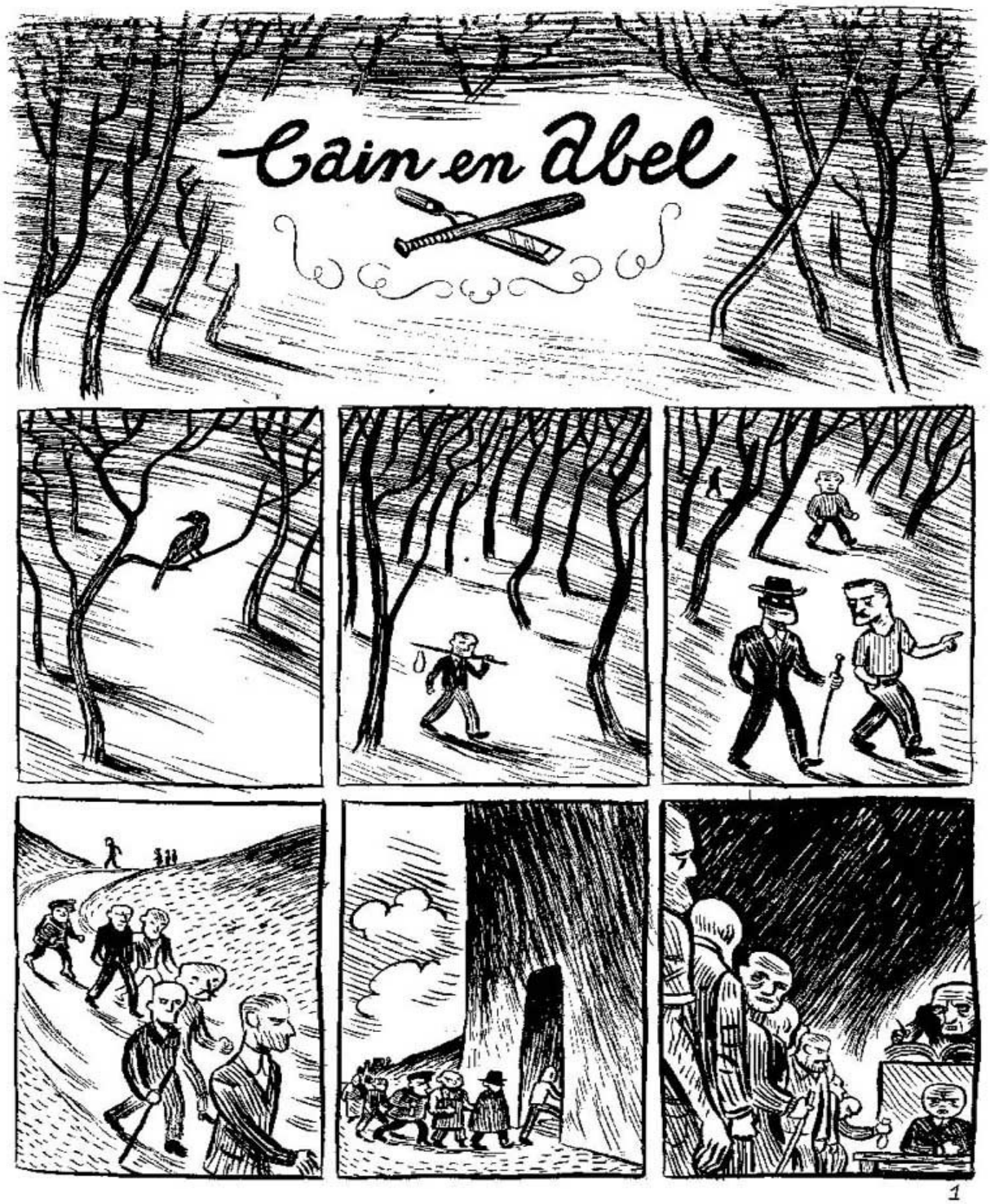
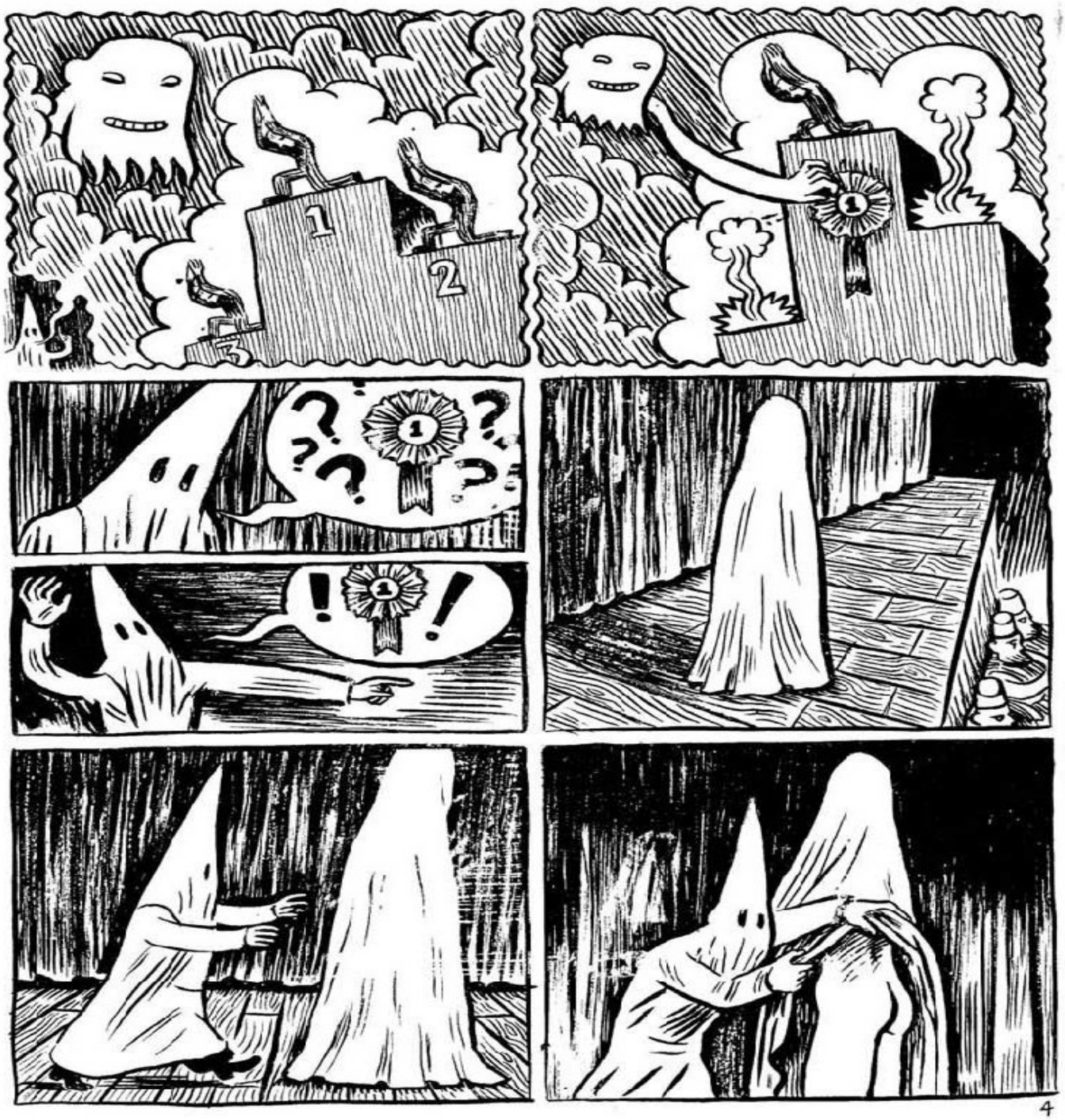


Fig. 7. Conrad Botes, *Cain & Abel*, (2008).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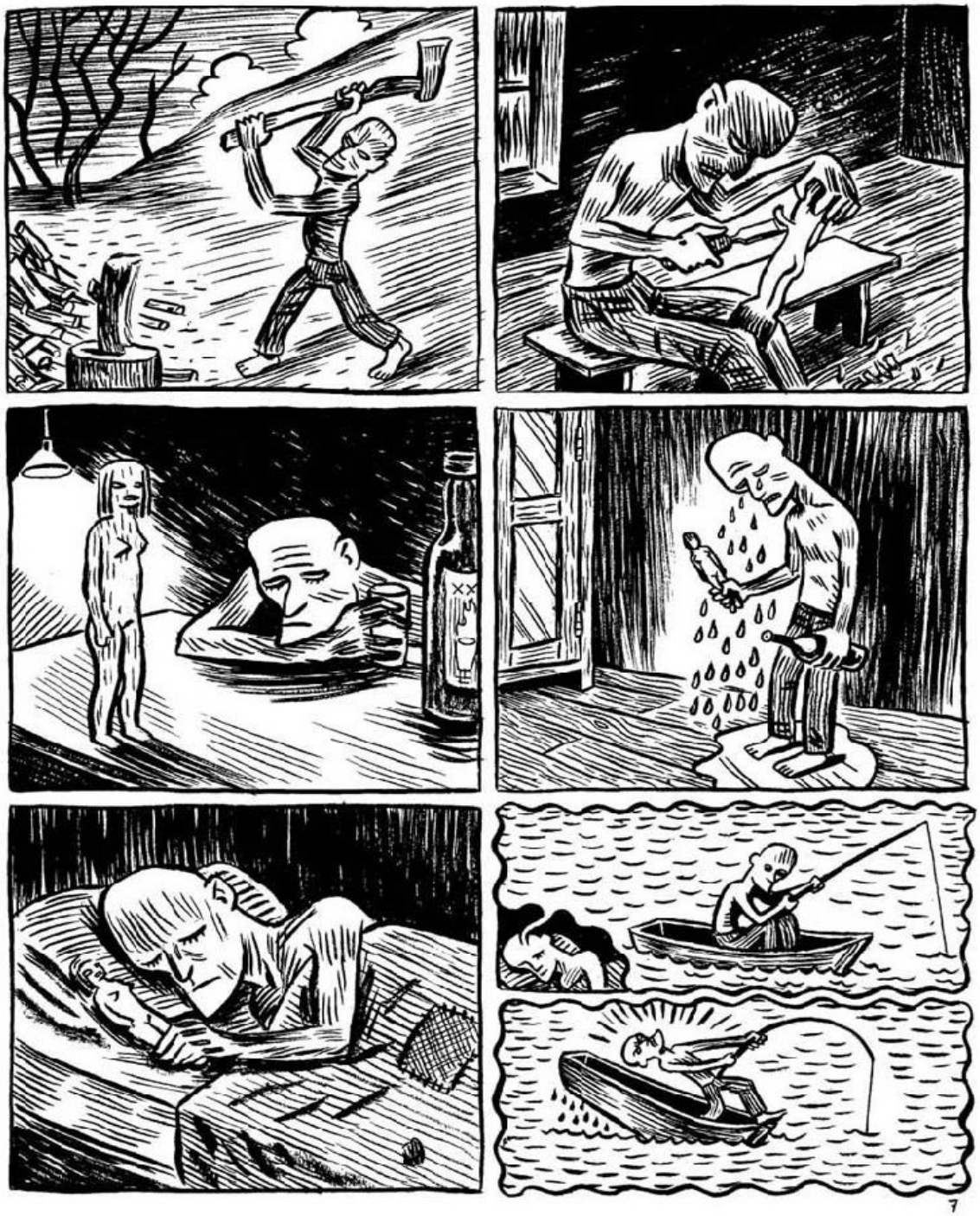


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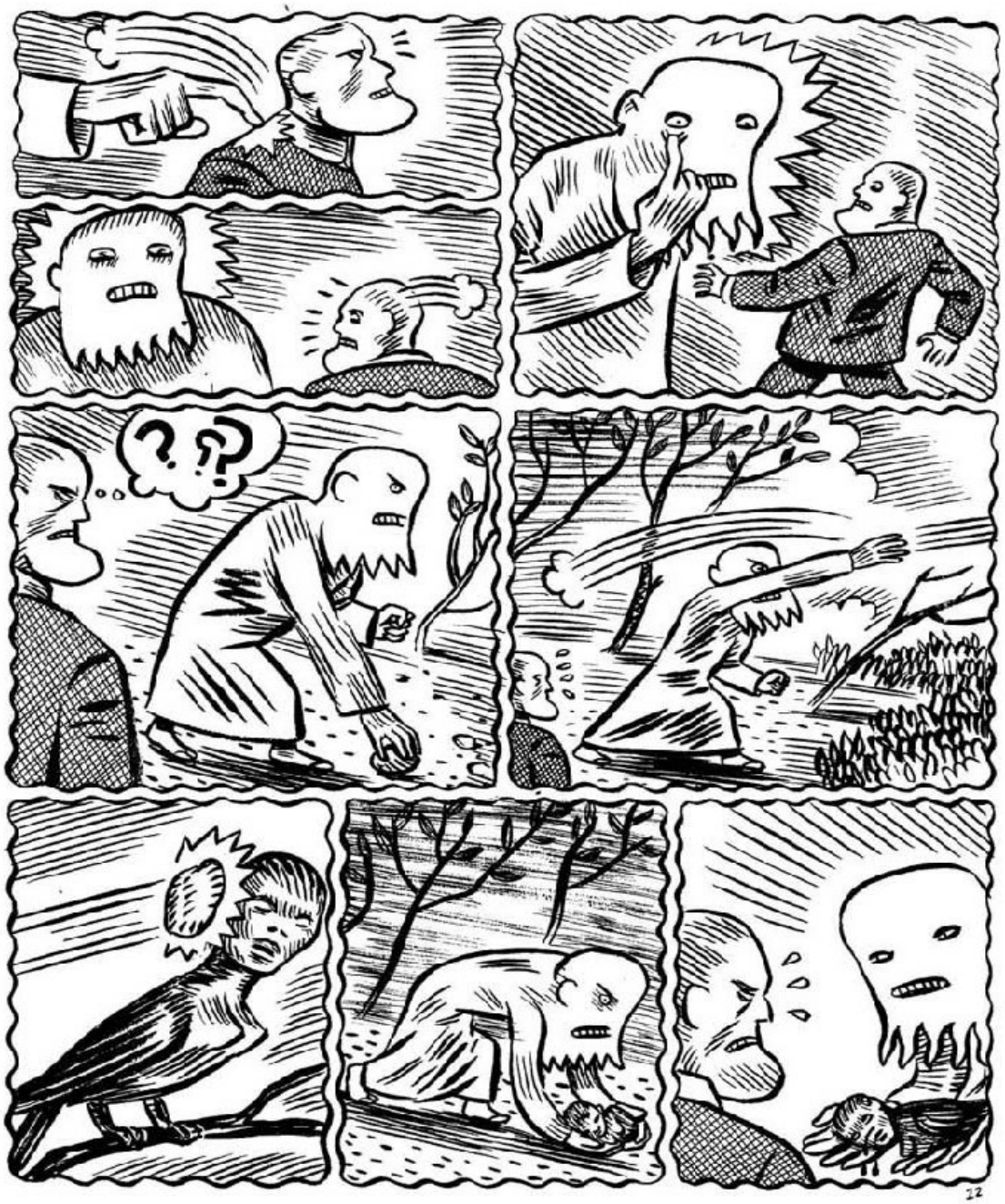
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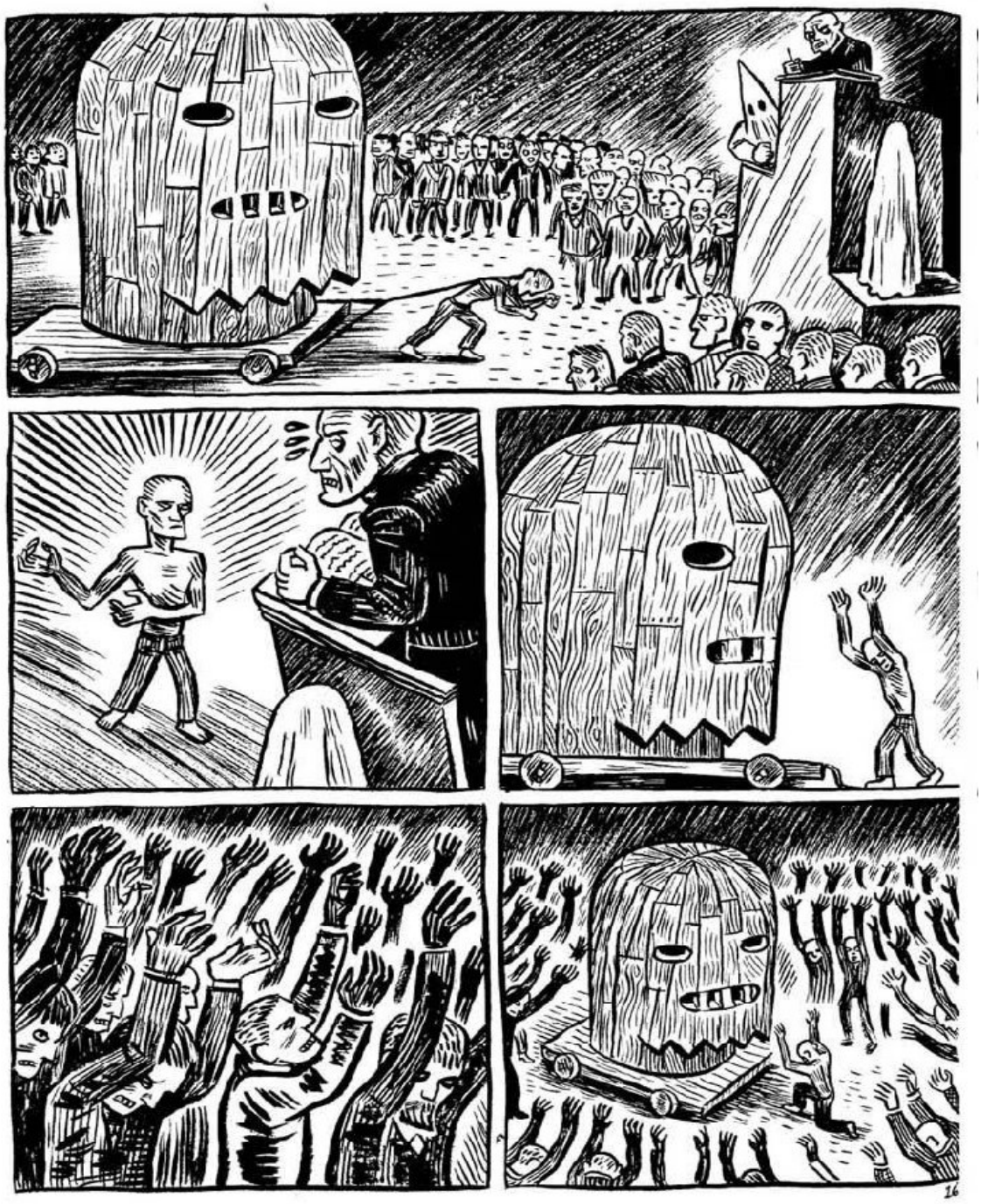

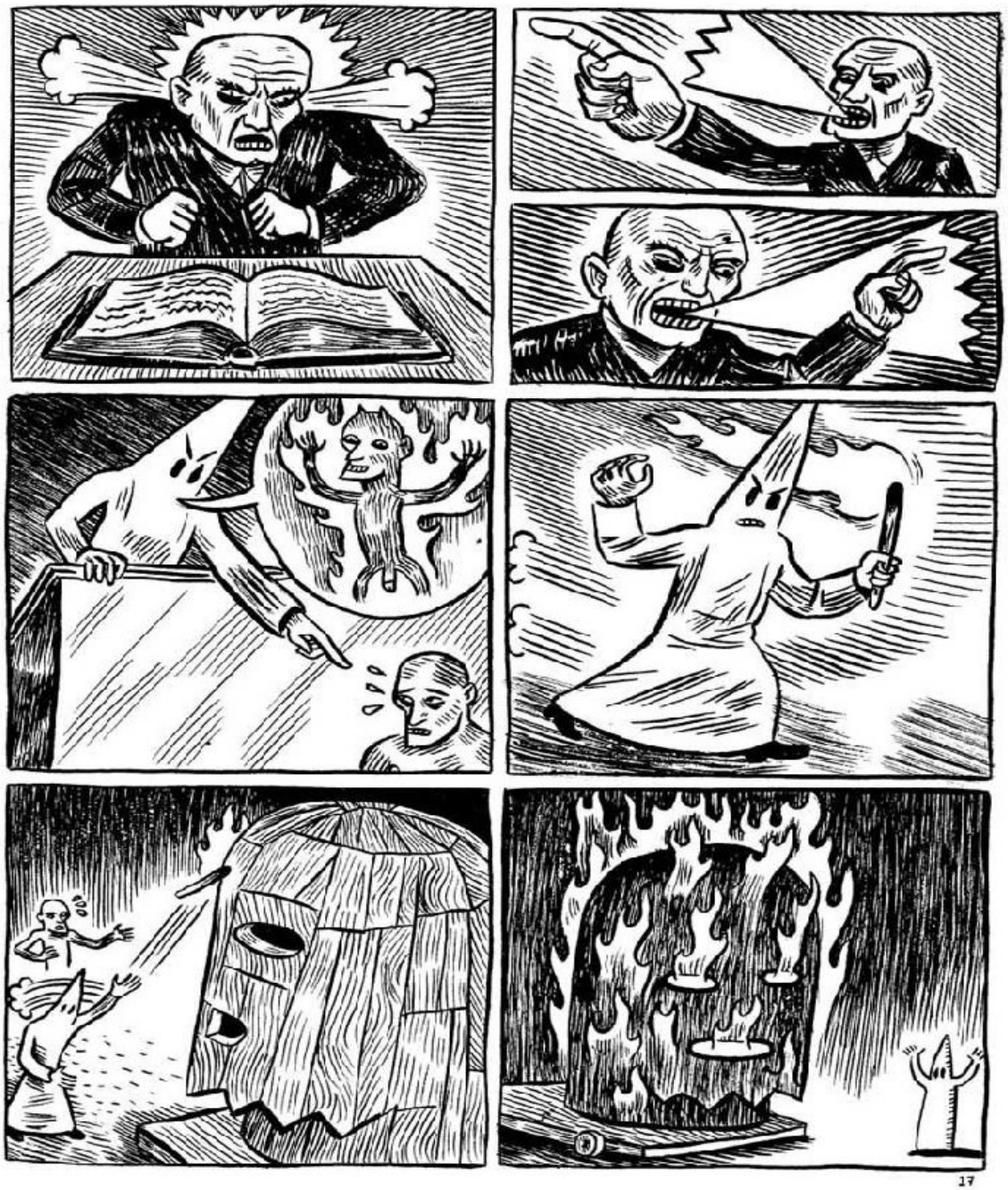
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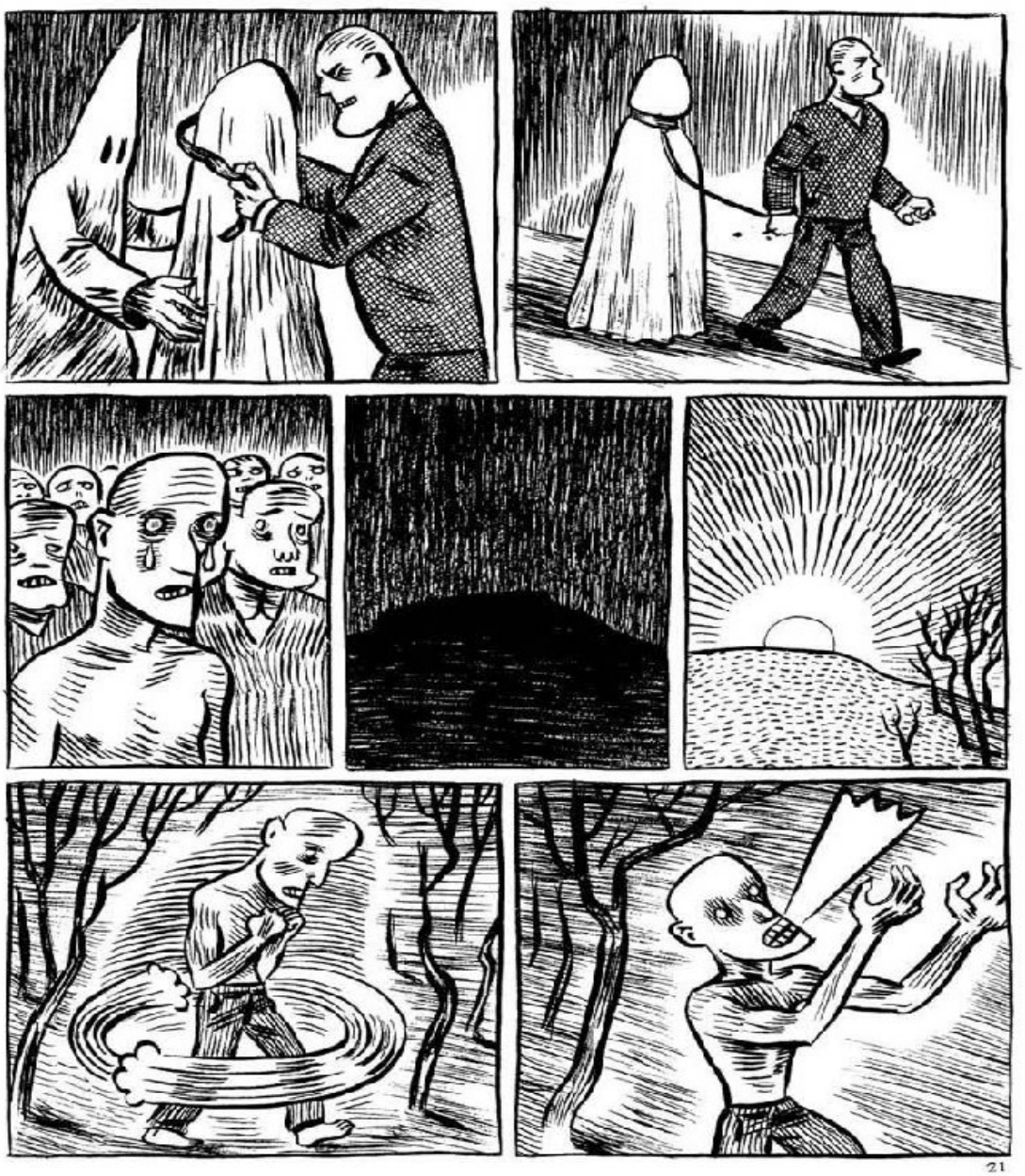
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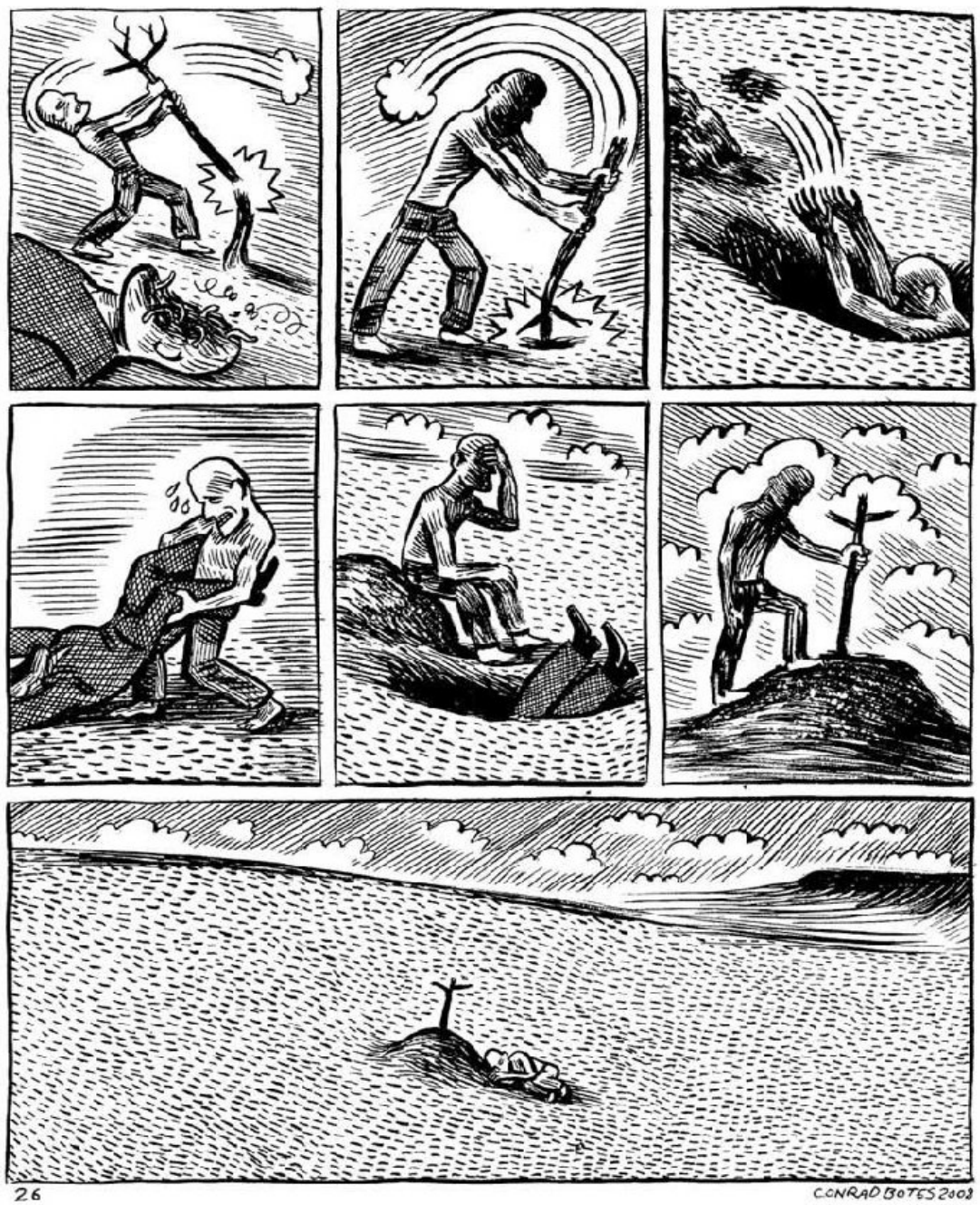
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Fig. 8. Susan Opperman, *Gifpit* (2010). Ink on Paper.

Fig. 9. Susan Opperman, *Ouma & Bitterbal* (2010). Ink on Paper.

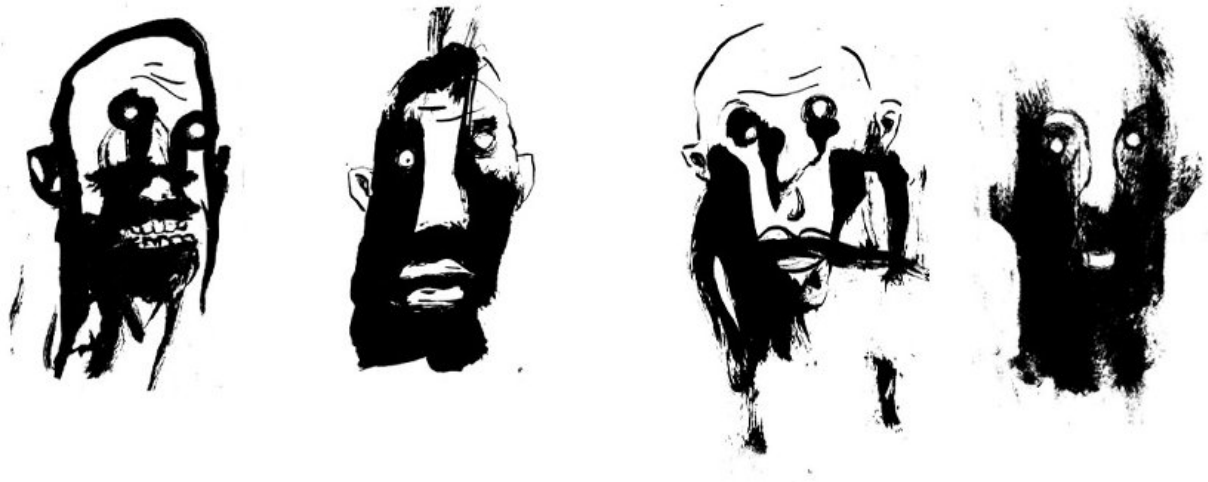

Fig. 10. Susan Opperman, *Vreemdeling* (2010). Ink on Paper.